WESTERN, ACTION AND SPORT STORIES

20c

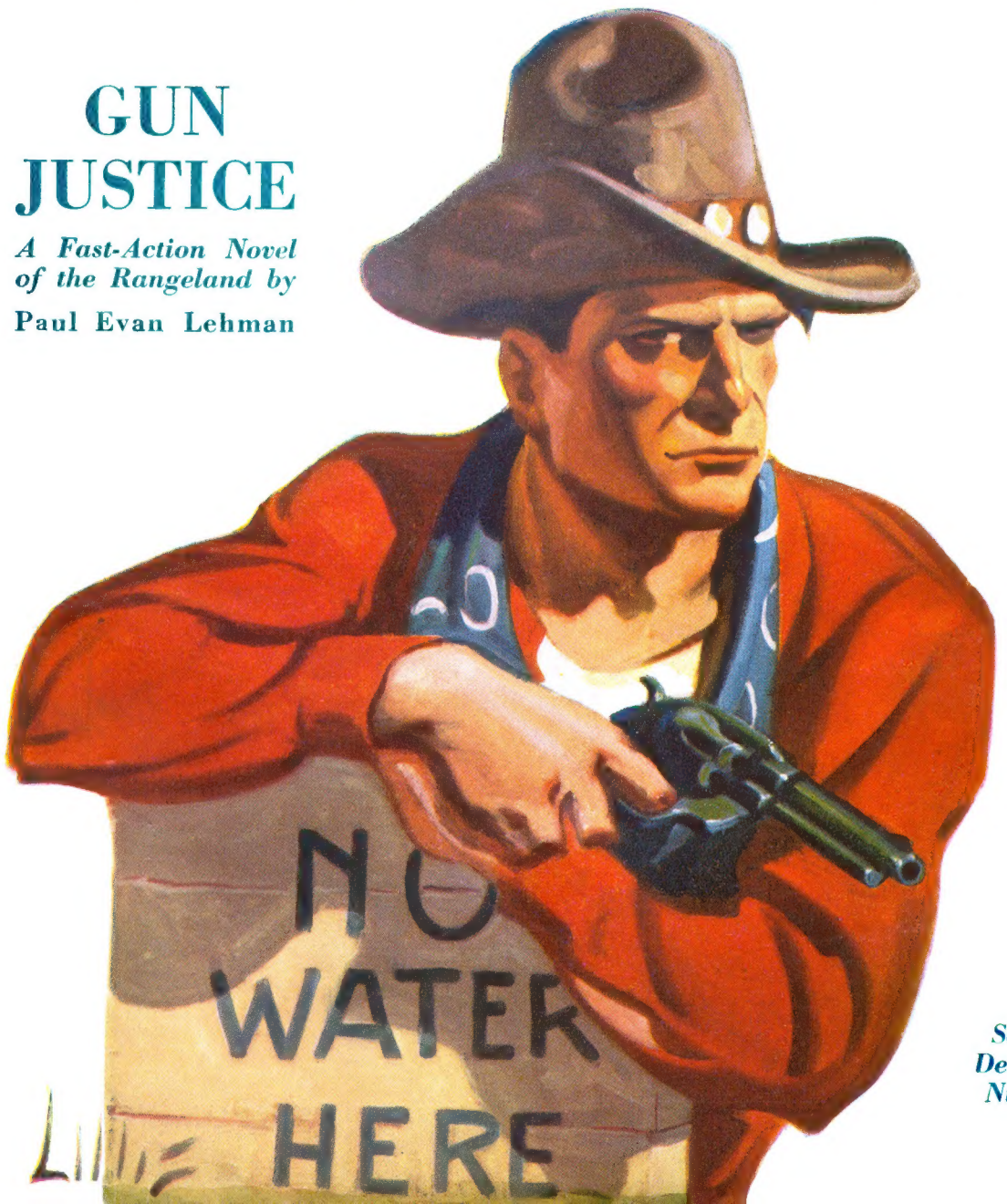
# Ace-High Magazine

A CLAYTON MAGAZINE

## GUN JUSTICE

*A Fast-Action Novel of the Rangeland by*

**Paul Evan Lehman**




*Second December Number*

Second December, 1932

ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE

20 cents

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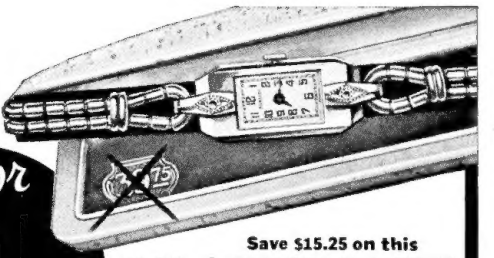

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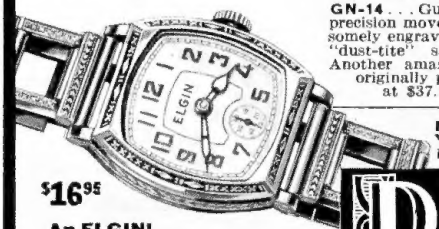


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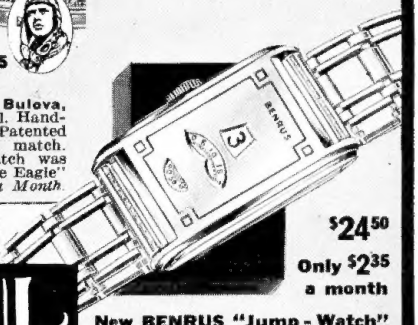


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**Vol. LXIX** **SECOND DECEMBER NUMBER** **No. 1**

**COVER DESIGN**.....**Richard Lillis**

## *A Complete Novel*

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*The man who had named his mine "Golden Lily" was missing . . . and another was in possession.*

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*Being the correspondence of one Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.*

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*The two old prospectors had hearts of gold.*

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*If you wish to exchange something you have but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it.*

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*"The Texas Cowboy's Last Song."*

***The Next Issue—First January—Goes on Sale Friday, December 2nd***

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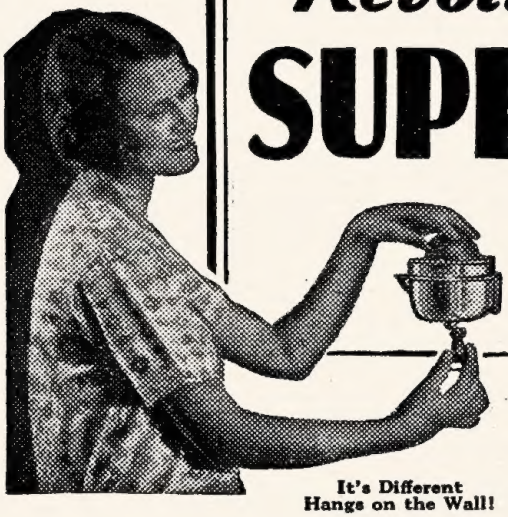

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The very day you come to Coyne you start learning practically! You build real batteries, wind armatures, work on huge motors, generators, switchboards, auto and airplane motors, giant electric signs, newest model electric refrigerators, power house equipment, etc., and go on frequent inspection trips to the world's greatest electric plants and electrically equipped industrial concerns. Knowledge comes to you in the surest, easiest way—by actually doing. That's why—by the Coyne method developed by the experience of more than a third of a century—you become a master electrician here in a fraction of the time it would take you to learn elsewhere. And the best proof of the value of the training is in the success of Coyne students. We'll gladly show you hundreds and hundreds of letters from men who are making good in the electrical industry who credit Coyne for all their success. You can do as well if you are earnest and want to learn. Get the facts about Coyne immediately.

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500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 92-66, Chicago, Ill.

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500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 92-66, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis: Send your big FREE BOOK ON ELECTRICITY and your Special Limited Offer. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....Town.....

Street.....State.....

# *MISTER ALIAS*

*By S. Omar Barker*

**Being the correspondence of one Ed (C. F.) Grimes, along with that of a few others interested and concerned with the whole affair.**

*Ad in Ace-High Magazine*
*(Feb., 1932)*

WANTED—INFORMATION

O'MARA, JAMES ERIN—Anyone who knows the whereabouts of James Erin O'Mara, 24 years old, please write. Last heard of on ranch near Bartlesville, Okla. Six feet tall, slender, blue eyes, hair auburn and curly. Has three chicken-pox scars in shape of triangle with point up on forehead between eyes. Good natured, prankish, always smiling. Might be under another name for a joke. Modest reward for information. Mrs. Timothy O'Mara, Laurel, Ark.

Chaco, New Mexico.
February 2, 1932.

Mrs. Timothy O'Mara,
Laurel, Ark.

Dear Madem:

Will say that I seen your ad where you was looking for a certain party an offering a modest reward for same. Only you do not say how modest, Madem, which I will say that the amt of mony I am needing mighty bad before the first day of March is one hunderd *pesos* is that two much? Will explain that the reason for me needing this here jack is kinder of a secret between me an a Jewellry Store in Las Vegas where I am going to town with a bunch of LS yearlens about Mar. One, an where is also the home of a certin young lady which would look mighty sweet with a dimund on the finger between the middle one an the little one on the near side. So with what I have done got saved up one hunderd smackers will do the trick an if I do not have it I might come back with a armlode of squashes instid as the Mexkins say.

So that is why I am answering your add because there is a certin party which is a new buckeroo on a ranch somewheres hereabouts that is tall with allburn hair about the right age an plenty pranky with a buckin bronco caboodlin between his leggs, but do not know if they is kinks in his hair because the bronc I seen him ride did not even bounce his hat off, although I do notice he has got him quite a scar on the forehead which it might be chickenpocks like you say, but looks a heap more like somebody had hit him with a horseshoe or maybe tried carvin him with a dull knife.

Will say that he goes by the name of Jim Timson altho called "Red" by the cowhands, which it don't take

much figgerin fer a smart feller to reduce that maybe he has jest took the name, fer a joke like you say, as a short cut fer "Timothy's-son," which I think of pronto when I seen your add. Will say farther that of coarse we do not know if his name is reely O'Mara or not nor where he drifts in from on acct. it is not polite in the cow country to ask such persunel questions of any stranger not only because it is not any of your busness but he mite dislike it an take a poke at your snoot. But for a reward of one hunderd dollers I will take the chance an ask him so please let me know if this is two much an quick because you know why.

Yrs truly,
(Mister) Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.

AD IN OKLAHOMA CATTLE NEWS
(Feb. 1932)

WANTED: For murder, Jim O'Mara, about 25 years old, alias Curly Red, Red Curly. Disappeared from cow ranch near Bartlesville about December 1st, 1931. Is cowboy, six feet tall, lanky, with blue eyes, red curly hair. Originally from Arkansas. Talks with drawl. Probably has newly healed scar somewhere about the head. Substantial reward for information.

Joe Heilwigg, Sheriff,
Bartlesville, Okla.

Chaco, New Mexico.
February 5, 1932.

Mr. Joe (Sheriff) Helwigg,
Bartlesville, Ok.
Dear Sir an Sheriff:

Will say that I hope you will receve this anyway altho it looks to a man up a tree like their must be some misstake in the name because how the h——l an hiwater would a man by such a name like Hellwigg git to be a sheriff? But will say that I seen your add where you was looking for a certain party for murder by the name of Jim O'Mara, otherwise knowed as Alias Curley Red an offering a substanshul reward for same only you do not say how substanshul, Sheriff, which I will explane that I am a plain cowhand which will be needing a certin amt of mony mighty bad before March 1st namely one hunderd smackers fer persunel reasons, is that two much?

Because if not will say that I am a person which keeps their eyes open an while I do not make no practice of kiyotin' around fer sheriffs of the law to help git some feller into trouble, it is a fact that I am in a bog fer one hunderd smackers before date menshuned an wish to know if that is what you mean by substanshul. Please write.

Yrs. Truly,
(Mister) Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.

P. S. Please do not jump in the river an start rampsin out here after this Jim O'Mara because I had not said that he is hear even but will say I am a person which keeps there eyes open day an night an also please give more perticklers who did he kill etc.

—Yrs. E. G.

Chaco, NM.
Febr. 7-32.

Mrs. Timothy O'Mara,
Lawrel, Arks.
Dear Madam:

Your letter to hand an will say that the five dollers which you offer for me to find out if this here Alias Curly Red Timson feller is your wandrin son or not an if so to put you in touch with him, is not enough jack to do me no good towards a dimund evun if Nellie will decide to have me. Which don't look so likely right now dimund or no dimund on acct. of new competishun none other than a certin party with more blarney than branes you might say, not to menshun red hair an' kinder of a way with wimmen which ought to be aginst the law, espeshully when what busness has he got hanging around town three days at a time when what he is hired for is to punch cattle fer the Fish Hook spread back west?

No, Madem, I do not think this feller is your boy, because from the nice kind of a letter you write I reduce

that you would not be the mother of a impident rooster like this which will try to cut in on another man's love affares, espeshully with a girl which is not only a nice girl with the purtiest brown eyes west of the Pecos, but also an honest working girl who is the best waitress in the city of Las Vegas an not noways flip.

So I will tell you what happend an you can judge fer yourself weather you would be the mother of an hombre as smart ellick as that. Well, will say that on a unexpected trip to town day before yesterdy, on busness for the LS, of coarse I drift around to the Pancake Palace, which is the restrunt where Nellie works, to see her an maybe make a date, not even waitin to shave. So who is there settin up to the pie counter but this here Jim Timson making more eyes at my Nellie than he is eating pie. So I take a seat at the other end of the counter frum where he is at.

"Hello, Nellie," I says, but looking stern an not smiling.

"Oh," she says, being too busy giggling at this red head to see who I am at first. "Oh, hello, Center-Fire. I wasn't expecting to see you in town today! Is it a funeral?"

Meaning a poke at the solem way I suppose I am looking I suppose.

"No," I comes back, looking her straight in the eye, "it looks like you wasent. An' it ain't a funeral, Nellie —not yet!" With which I give this Alias Timson a hard look but instid of seeing what I mean, which is for him to take warnin an not git too fresh with my girl, all he does is put out a big ha-ha, an rub his chin which is smooth shove an not whiskery like mine coming right in off the trail.

"Nellie," he cracks, "is that a customer hidin' in them bushes, or is it a porkypine?"

To which Nellie kinder giggles, an to which I am about to answer by asking Nellie since when the Pancake Palace has took to serving redheaded runaway renegades by the name of Alias, when a drummer comes in an as Nellie goes to take his order I know she will not hear me, so I do not say it.

Will say, Mrs. O'Mara, that this here drummer orders the reglar dinner, which when Nellie brings it to him, it is mostly a fine big dish of Mexkin beans than which there ain't no appetizinger food alive. But the drummer jest takes one sniff an lets out a snort.

"Beans!" he growls. "Take 'em away! Do I look like a bean-eatin' Mexkin—or a cowhand. Take 'em back, an' bring me somethin' fit to—"

Will say that he don't git no further on acct. of this Alias Timson feller stepping over to the table even before I have got time to think of it, like the smart ellick he is. He hauls out his hawgleg (which is cowboy talk fer a smoke iron, Madem) an stands there with it acrost the table frum the snortin' drummer.

"Yes, sir, feller," he says. "Beans. Will yuh eat 'em decent with a spoon, or do I load 'em into this here pistola an shoot 'em down yer throat one at the time?"

Well, Madem, will say that the drummer eats them beans, an maybe you will not believe it, but the way Nellie looks at him frum then on you would think this Alias was a shore-nough hell-fer-leather hero, an when he finely drifts on out she heaves her a great big sigh.

"Oh, Center-Fire," she says. "Ain't he grand!"

"Nellie," I tells her, "to judge by his looks the first time you see one, the skunk is a very handsome an attracktive animul which so long as he has things his own way is also very brave. But beware of too close a acquaintance with same."

Saying which I go frum there, not even stopping when Nellie trys to call me back with what you might call the honeyed words of a sireen song, though feeling some better when I hear them.

So will say, Madem, that I come right on back at the ranch an do not know if I will ever need to buy that dimund or not, but will say that if this discripshun fits your wandring boy, I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings, but will not charge you nothing at all for the imformation, not even the five dollars, on acct. I reduce from your letter that you are a poor widow lady to which a dollar is a dollar, an besides this here Alias Red Curly Timson ain't a man such as would be worth it even if he was your son which I doubt it.

Wishing you the same,
Yrs truly,
Ed (C. F.) Grimes.

Mr. Joe (Sheriff) Heilwagg,
Bartlesvile, Okl.
Dear Sir an Sheriff:

Will say I have got your letter saying that it dont matter who he killed nor why only it was in conneckshun with a bank robery, but the main point is that the reward is $250 cash fer this here Alias Curly Red O'Mara, dead or alive, delivered to the law, if I ackshully have got some track of him to quit stallin an come thru.

Well, Mister Sheriff Hallwegg or however to the h——l you spell it, will say that I am not no man to talk sassy to, even by a Sheriff, but will say that I am a man which will keep his eyes open day an night an which needs the money, even if not for the purpose first menshuned, an you might as well begin counting it out because the next time you here from me your man will be hogtied like a stray calf in a canyon, waiting fer you to come after him an dont fergit the cash.

Yrs. truly,
Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.

P. Script. No monky busness now like notifying the sheriff out hear so as to spook up this wanted party an start him driftin before I can spread my loop. This here is MY party, Sheriff, as I do not like the sk——k none two good anyways—E. Grimes.

Las Vegas, N. M.
Feb. 11, 1932.

Mr. Edward Grimes,
LS Ranch,
Chaco, N. M.
Dear Center-Fire:

I am sorry if I made you go off mad the other day. I did not mean to. Can't you come to town again soon?

Your girl friend,
Nellie Owens.

Chaco, N. Mex.
Feb. 11, 1932.

Miss Nellie Owens,
Care of Pancake Palace,
Las Vegas, N. Mex.
Dear Miss Owens:

Will say that I am surprised for you to write me a letter as I am not by no means such a man as is grand and has got allburn curls. Which you will be the one surprised when you here about what will happen when I go over to the Fishhook tomorrow to make a call on him. Jest wait till you hear.

Yrs. truly,
Ed Grimes.

Chaco, N. M.
Feb. 12, 1932.

Mrs. T. O'Mara,
Laurel, Arkans.
Dear Madem:

Will say that your letter has come saying that from the descripshun this here Alias feller is none other than James Erin O'Mara your son even if I do not think he is such a man as would be the son of a mighty fine old lady like I reduce you to be from your letters. An I have got to say farther that I am glad you do not git mad at me for laying out what a no-acct. hombre I figgered he was, but that you would love him an want to hear from him jest the same even if he was a thief or a murderer because after all he is your boy. That's the talk, Madem!

Well, Mrs. O'Mara I am sorry if I have made you feel bad because of coarse I did not think this Alias Tim-

son could be him not to mention me being a little mad on the acct. of him flirting with Miss Nellie Owens of the Pancake Palace Restrunt. So I notice where you inclose a letter fer me to give him an tell him to please write home to his old Ma an the reason I have not done same is because when I ride over to the Fishhook this AM whoa an behold, they tell me that Alias Curly Red has done took out fer parts unknown an no doubt for a joke in his playfull way has done so without leavin no forwardin address, so of coarse I could not give him your letter, but I am a man which keeps his eyes open day an night you might say an will deliver him your messidge sooner or later if it takes till next Chrismus pervided he has not plumb left the country or I cannot here where he went to.

Now do not fret Madem, because I will say confidenshully that maybe it is a good thing he took out frum here as this is not none two healthy a range fer fellers which go around with the name of Alias So-an'-So, even though harmless an for a joke. An will say farther that maybe he is making a circle which will bring him back to the ole home ranch in Arkans. to see you anyway who knows.

Yrs trully,
Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.

P. S. I see by your letter to him that you tell him to be a good boy an not to cut me out of my girl as I am a gentlemun which us two had ought to be good friends. Well thanks but will say that I am a man which if I cannot rope my own broncs from the remuda I will walk. An the same way with wimmen. Hoping you will soon git well of your roomatizum, I remane yrs. trly.—E. G.

Chaco, New Mex.
Feb. 12, 1932.

Mr. Sheriff Joe Hellwigger,
Bartlesville, Oklah.

Dear Sir an Sheriff:

Well Sheriff, will say that it is all off. The wolf has done smelled the trap an took out, in other words flew the coop. Plumb vamoosed. An will say that probly it was not him noway an even so I reckun there is persunel reasons why I could not very well collect that reward anyways. So you can take up your loop an fergit it.

Yrs. truly,
Ed (C. F.) Grimes.

Chaco, NM
Feb. 15, 1932.

Mister Joe. Sheriff Hullwagg,
Sheriff, Bartlesvile, Ok.

Dear Sir an Sheriff:

Will say that your letter to hand to inform me that you are notifying all officers hereabouts to be on the lookout fer this Alias Curly Red feller an that same if caught will not noways pervent me from sharing in the reward on acct. of me being the first to tip you off. Now Sheriff dident I tell you to lay off that notifying busness because suppose it is not the man you are after anyways. Will say farther to h——l with the hole business.

Yrs. truly,
Ed Grimes.

Las Vegas, N.M.
Feb. 16, 1932.

Mr. Ed Grimes,
LS Ranch,
Chaco, N. M.

Dear Center Fire:

You don't need to be so high-horse with me, cowboy. But even if you don't like *me* any more, please hurry and come into town because while I do not know for sure, I have got a hunch about something important and I need your advice. I don't want to tell you in a letter but I have heard a rumor that worries me. Hurry or it may be too late.

Your friend,
Nellie Owens.

Chaco, N.M.
Febr. 18, 1932.

Mrs. T. O'Mara,
Laurrel, Arkns.
Dear Madem:

Will say that even the best of us is sometimes mistook about this or that an it seams that maybe I am wrong about your son (going by the name of Alias Curly Red in these parts, also Timson) having vamoosed frum here, as I hear that he has been saw in Thornbush Gulch by a couple of LS riders which tell me he says he is laying out to do some wolf trapping being that punching cows does not pay enough sugar to sweeten his coffee the way he likes it. Now Madem, I would go straight to Thornbush Gulch to see him this very day, but I have got a mighty urgunt call to Las Vegas though somewhat of a misstery, so have got a three day layoff frum the boss an as soon as I have went in an saw what is it Nellie wants to tell me, I will git out on the trail to deliver your letter, so you may expect to here from me again soon an probly also your son with the red hair. Leaving for Las Vegas at once.

Wishing you the same.

Yrs. trully,
Center-Fire Grimes.

Chaco, NM.
Feb. 18—late that night.

J. Hellwigg, Sheriff,
Bartlesvile, Oklaho.
Dear Sir an Sheriff:

*Whango!* It's done happened, an you can now perceed to call off your dawgs. Well, will say it is kinder of a boggy mess, Sheriff, expeshully fer yrs truly by the name of Ed Grimes, but will explane as follers:

I leave the LS this morning purty much in the AM on acct. of a urgunt call to go to Las Vegas, so I am taking a rough shortcut over the Creston, loping along purty smart about six mile frum town when I see a streak of dust travellin a purty good clip along the flats towards the mouth of Bonito Canyon off to my left. Which at first I do not pay it much mind an then one of these hunches ketches me right in the gizzurd an tells me that anybody ridin that fast up Bonito Canyon, I would sure like to know what for the hurry. So will say that I drop off the Creston an put the hooks to my ol' Jughead so as to cut off that streak of dust about the mouth of the canyon.

Well, I do not quite make it, but I see the rider disapperin up ahead so I take out after him an around the second curve I come right up on him off his horse, a-fixin a heavy lookin sack he's got tied on back of the saddle, an cook my corns, if it aint none other than our friend the red hedded Mister Alias with about the sweatinest horse a feller ever sees.

Well, *whango,* Mister Sheriff! I'm dogged if he dont whirl smack around, unlimber his hawgleg an start bangin away at me without neither welcome nor warnin. Six shots straight but seem like he is too nervuss to shoot good, so of coarse he misses an it would of been plumb easy fer me to take to the bresh an git away unhurt, an will say that as fur as you an your reward is concerned I would have done same. Because by this time I have come to the conclusion that I do not hanker to do no more kiyotin around fer Oklahoma sheriffs like I done wrote you. But I will say that I have got other persunel reasons which impells me to jump him, which I will explane later.

So before this here Alias Curly Red Jim Timson James E. O'Mara has got time to sneeze an reload, I'm on him like two kiyotes on a nanny goat. Will say that for a few minutes it is quite a rastle, an it looks like I may have to shoot him to tame him, but finely I git in a good whack of the gun butt over his ear an am settin' a-straddle of him.

"Now then, frend Alias," I says, "Listen here to Papa: Is your name James Erin O'Mara, or aint it?"

"No! You *blank-blanked blank!*" he groans. "It aint! Lemme up frum hear before I—"

"You are a liar, Alias Jim," I says, plenty calm, at the same time drawin forth frum my pockit a letter frum Mrs. Timothy O'Mara of Laurel, Arks. "An do not wiggle so much or I will crack you anuther one. Now hear is a letter, you jughead, frum your pore ol' mother back in Laurel, Arks., an you will please read same."

Will say that he done so on acct. of me setting there on his briskit so he cannot do otherwise. Which as he reads it he gits kinder pale an shaky.

"Why, why dammit, man," he says finely. "Where'd you git this? Looky hear, if you've bin writin the dirt about me to my mother, I'll—I'll, by God, I'll kill you if—"

"Will say that you are not jest now in shape to make Big Talk, Jim," I says. "But will also say that I have not wrote your mother nothing worse about you than that you was a damn smart ellick, not even telling her that you are the Alias feller wanted by Mister Sheriff Joe Hellwugg of Bartlesvile, Okl. for murder. An right now I do not want no sass. All I want is that you take this hear pencil an paper an set hear on this rock an write a letter to said mother which you ought to be ashamed that you went off an left her suffering back there in Laurel, Arks. with the roomatizum an a busted hart because of your caboodlin off hither an yon without never even writing to her, you scrub! An tell her you will be startin home to see her pronto, savvy!"

Will say that under the auspishus of my .45, he took pencil in hand an done as directed. When he is through he is lookin more sad than mad, handing me the letter.

"Your a white man, cowboy," he says, "an' I wish to h——l that—"

*Whango,* Sheriff! All of a sudden there is a clatter of gallopin hoofs frum down the canyon, a bullet fans my nose, an whoa an behold, me standin there like a paralized stature, this here Alias Curly Red busts off in a snarl, kicks my gun out of my hand, grabs it up, jumps to the saddle an starts scootin' to h——l outa there. But will say he don't scoot far till a bullet frum this here pursuin posse downs his horse.

"Throw 'em up, you kiyote!" yells depitty sheriff Brite Bagley, which is leadin the posse. But instid of throwin 'em up, this here Alias kid lets out a snarlin laugh as he flops down back of his dead pony.

"Come an git me, you blank blank blankits!" he yells.

Well, Sheriff, will say that Brite an his boys done so, it being quite a fight while it lasted. With the results that two posse men is wounded an Alis Curly Red dies with his boots on an his gun *(my* gun reely) spittin' hot lead. Also smilin!

So to make a long story snort, Sheriff Holewigg, will say that Alias Curly Red had jest come frum robbin the bank at Las Vegas, an that what my lady frend, Miss Nellie Owens of the Pancake Palace Restrunt, had wanted to see me about was to tell me a hunch she had that he was going to try same, but of coarse like the jughead I am, I am too late gitting in to town, but if I had not happined to hold up Curly Red to write that letter to his Ma, probly he might of got away because it is the noise of his shooting at me that has steered the posse back onto his trail. So do not know if I am intitled to any of the reward or not an would not take it anyhow except for some persunel an privit reasons.

O, yes, for a while I am in a bog to explane to the boys how come I am here in Bonito Canyon with the bank robber an his lute, but showing them the letters an so forth finely I come clear.

Now, Sheriff, the boys out hear have done agreed to keep this here out of the papers at least the name of James E. O'Mara an will say that I

do not want nobody to go notifying Mrs. T. O'Mara of Laurel, Arks. of the way it reely happined, which if I hear of you doing same, I will rampse into Bartlesvile *muy pronto* an if any rocks in that part of Oklaho. will bank your head aginst same. I will write Mrs. O'Mara all the needed perticklers myself in persun, savvy.

Yrs trully,
Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.

TELEGRAM.
To ED GRIMES LAS VEGAS N M
FEB 20-32. 9 P M
Las Vegas Sheriff confirms death of Jim O'Mara stop am wiring two fifty reward stop half to you stop my mouth shut stop my name spelled H-E-I-L-W-I-G-G stop.

Sheriff Joe Heilwigg,
Bartlesville, Okla.

Las Vegas, NM
Febr. 21st, 1932.

Mrs. Timothy O'Mara,
Laurel, Arks.
Dear Madem:

Will say that this is not no easy letter to write, Madém, as I am better to swing a lass rope than a pencil. Please do not feal bad, Mrs. O'Mara, but will say that the inclosed letter from your son was wrote only a short whiles before he come to his fighting end laying behind a shot horse up Bonito Canyon. Madem, this is a rough country where a man does not never know what will happen next. But will say that you can always remember your Jim that he died with his boots on, fighting like a man, with a smile on his face an the last one he talked about was you, so that when he gits home (we have done started him on the train) you can look at him an say "hear was a man that died brave, like he lived."

Also I enclose one hundred dollars which Jim had saved up to bring you when he come home.

Will say, Mrs. O'Mara, that both me an Nellie, which will soon become Mrs. Grimes, sends best regards an mighty sorry it all had to happen. Write us sometimes how you git along.

Your frend,
Ed Grimes.

Chaco, NM.
Feb. 23rd.

Sheriff Joe Heilwigg,
Bartlesvile, Okla.
Dear Frend Sheriff:

Will say I am now back at the LS at work an will say, Sheriff, you are a white man.

Will say thanks for the reward which the Sheriff an boys used their half to fix up the body an send it back proper to Laurel, Ark., an which with my half Nellie an me has decided that true love does not need no dimund. So one hunderd has done gone to Mrs. T. O'Mara of Laurel, Arks. to help doctor her roomatizum. Ten of the remaining 25 Nellie suggests we buy with it flowers fer the Alias kid's funeral when he gits home, an you would be surprised what a nice little engagement ring a feller can buy though of coarse not a dimund fer fifteen bucks, not even waiting till the first of March when I am going to take a bunch of LS yearlens to LV. Also a wedding Mar 2nd to which if you are out this way anyplace we would be glad to have you fer the best man. It would look in the Las Vegas Daily Optic: "Sheriff J. Hellwigger of Oklah, best man!" hey?

Wishing you the same,
Yrs truly,
Ed (Center-Fire) Grimes.

# *DESERT DUST*

## *By Hapsburg Liebe*

**It isn't every prospector who has a heart of gold. And it isn't every old-timer who can handle a six-gun like either Henry or Landsinger could. But then not many towns can boast of a "Dogtown" Granby. . . . Somehow, Mesquit Bend enjoyed the combination.**

THEY were scraggly-bearded and squint-eyed, and tanned to the hue of weathered copper, this pair of ancient prospectors. Joshua Landsinger was tall and exceedingly gaunt, a person of few words, as a general thing; "Doodlebug" Henry was very small and thin, and usually very garrulous. Each was ambidextrous and in his young manhood had been a double-gunned daredevil. Wizened little Henry remembered answering to the far-flung nickname, "Cimarron Kid." Landsinger still dreamed of wild old days when the dark-skinned hombres of the Border had alluded to him fearsomely as "El Halcon," the Hawk.

The hard-bitten ex-terror of the Cimarron country rode to Mesquit Bend for supplies, and the equally hard-bitten Landsinger began to count the hours until his partner's return. In the month just passed they'd been lucky in their never-ending hunt for the precious yellow. Old Joshua now cherished visions of something fancy in the line of edibles. Bacon and beans, sourdough biscuit and black coffee straight for a year or so fag the appetite. The tall *viejo* looked forward to tinned apricots.

Henry should have been back in mid-afternoon of the second day, even considering the set, plodding gait of the led pack mule. When the red-hot desert sun had gone down and there was yet no crawling speck on the horizon, Joshua Landsinger scented calamity. Perhaps it was because he was so lonesome without Doodlebug. They'd been partners for upwards of thirty years. Doodlebug, he told himself, might have fallen sick and died, or he might have been robbed or killed, or both. Landsinger caught his raw-boned horse and saddled it, filled his saddle canteen, dug out another old six-gun and belt of cartridges and buckled them on. Then he mounted and rode toward Mesquit Bend to investigate.

He rode most of the night, reaching town shortly before daybreak. The dusty, stony streets were deserted. Nowhere did he see a light. He tied the rein of his weary horse to a hitch-rack in front of the one big saloon and sat down on the warped wooden sidewalk to await some sign of life. Dog-tired, he stretched himself out before the main entrance of the saloon and soon went to sleep in spite of his anxiety on Henry's account.

The toe of a boot in his gaunt ribs woke him more than an hour later. It hurt, and there certainly was no excuse for it. Landsinger rose with both hands full of worn black-walnut and steel that glinted in the early sunlight. The heavily built and dark, colorfully-garbed man who had delivered the brutal kick was the saloon keeper. Quickly he did another unwise thing. Had he known that Joshua Landsinger was more dangerous than heated dynamite—but he didn't know.

"Why, you old tarantula!" he bit out, and went to an armpit holster for a pretty silver-mounted thirty-eight.

Landsinger's right-hand forty-five belched flame and lead and smoke to the accompaniment of a thunderous roar, and the owner of the saloon dropped like a pole-axed beef. Not a word had passed the lips of the grizzled ancient. Doodlebug Henry was for the moment relegated to the limbo of the forgotten. Out of the corners of his squinted eyes old Joshua saw that men were running toward him. He sprang for his horse and was half in the saddle when Sheriff Abner Telford and a deputy each seized him by an arm and dragged him back to his feet in the street dust. He had no strength to waste in resistance that must prove futile. He growled:

"Take it easy, Ab. Don't git overhet. It skassly pays."

With their free hands the officers of the law snatched away his guns. The sheriff was elderly, lean, and had a set look of worriment on his face. He knew the pair of prospectors a little—as well, perhaps, as anybody knew them. He began: "You danged old pepper-pod, what got into you, anyhow?"

Landsinger indicated the inert figure on the warped sidewalk boards nearby, and answered: "That polecat kicked me and then started to fix to go for his weepon, Ab."

Sheriff Telford noted that the saloonkeeper's silver-mounted thirty-eight was still in its holster, and he ran his gaze over the thin, early crowd.

"Anybody see it done?"

There were no witnesses, evidently. Landsinger suffered himself to be led down the street and to the squat jail building, in a front corner of which the Mesquit Bend sheriff had his office.

"I'll do what I can for you, old-timer," Telford said, as he unlocked and opened a cell door of iron lattice-work.

The new prisoner thought again of Doodlebug Henry. He stepped across the gloomy threshold and drew up short, staring as though at a ghost. On a narrow bed in a corner of that same cell Doodlebug sat blinking at him!

"You—hod-dang you!" suddenly erupted old Joshua. "You bander-shanked, pigeon-toed, fiddle-bellied packrat! You come to town after s'plies, git on a rampage and gamble all of our grub-stake away! Can you think o' one single, solitary reason why I ortn't to choke hell plum' square out o' you, you fiddle-bellied packrat?"

On the other side of the iron door, Abner Telford heard, frowned, and lingered. Old Joshua had jumped at a conclusion. But his guess wasn't so poor, at that.

"Choke me if you wants to, Josh-away," meekly replied Doodlebug, one clawlike hand caressing his thinly-bearded chin. "But afore you does it, I craves to explain. Joshaway, I ort

to had better sense, but apparently I didn't have. Some cowpoke, he gimme a long drink, and she mellered me up a heap, and I got to thinkin' about you in yore pore rags. Thinks I to myself, Joshaway:

"Now, if I can play stud and win a leetle extry dinero, I'll buy pore old Joshaway some new clothes. Y'see, I'd allus beat you playin' stud with matches. But the hombre I played with, he cleaned me so danged quick that my head ain't quit swimmin' yit! All right, Joshaway, I reckon that's all I got to say. Go to chokin'."

"And," Landsinger sneered, "they put you in jail here because you played stud and lost—hod-dang you, you can tell that to the hoot-owls!"

Sheriff Telford spoke from the cell door: "I didn't jail Doodlebug for that, Josh. I jailed him for shootin' the saloon and town up after he'd lost his money. I shore didn't know that one little old coot like him could burn so much gunpowder in so short a time —lucky he didn't hit anybody. Looked like he was huntin' trouble, wearin' two guns that way."

"But I has to wear two smoke-poles or none," wailed Doddlebug, "for because I'm so danged little that one gun pulls me sideways and throws me out of balance. I told you that, at fust, Ab."

"Who was that there fancy-dressed polecat I drilled a minute ago?" Landsinger inquired of the sheriff.

"The same hombre that won Doodlebug's money," growled the sheriff. " 'Dogtown' Granby, the plum' slickest gambler I've ever seen; comes in here some months ago from a place on Texas tidewater and gambled with anybody for any stakes. Cheated, yeah, but couldn't be caught at it. Soon he owned the saloon. Then he loant about a third o' the fool male population o' this town money on mortgages, and won it back, and still had their homes under his thumb. Then half o' the ranchers in the county was rustled to death, and Granby loant 'em money on mortgages, and they cain't pay out. He was back o' that rustlin', o' course, but there was no proof. Tried to boss everything and everybody, and danged near done it. Border riff-raff and for-hire killers flocked to him like flies to m'lasses. When he didn't want a man around, that man turned up dead—and no proof.

"Landsinger, I hated havin' to pretend I was mad about you drillin' Granby when I arrested you. If I hadn't thought fast, old-timer, you'd 'a' been shot in the back by some o' Granby's cutthroats!"

Joshua Landsinger said: "Shore looks like the public ort to thank me for removin' sech a pi'zen varmint—"

The interruption came from a point just behind Sheriff Abner Telford in the jail corridor. It was a cold, hard voice:

"Yeah? You old tarantula, the public cain't thank you yet awhile!"

The officer wheeled and gasped. There stood Dogtown Granby!

This would-be boss of town and county was a trifle pale, but otherwise he was himself again. Landsinger's bullet had been a little high; it had struck Granby's light gun in its armpit holster, and the jolt had merely staggered the star gambler's heart for a few minutes. Telford spoke in the grimmest fashion:

"Dogtown, yo're lucky, somehow. But I'll pin a hangin' on you yet. There's a few hombres in a hundred miles o' here that don't owe you money and ain't afraid o' you and yore Border scrapin's, and I'm one o' 'em. Get out!"

The ultra-cunning and ultra-villainous Granby leered, but said nothing, turned on his heel, and left the squat building. The sheriff unlocked the cell door and liberated both Henry and Landsinger. "Them which don't like it," he declared, "can lump it. You *viejos* better high-tail it from Mesquit Bend pronto, is my advice."

"And us without a scrap to eat and prackly starvin'?" grumbled old

Joshua. "They's a plum' needcessity for us to raise a grub-stake fust."

Telford nodded. "All right. I'll keep yore four guns here until you get ready to start. Granby wouldn't risk havin' unarmed old-timers shot down on the street in broad daylight, I'm shore."

He gave the lank, hungry-looking Landsinger a dollar, and the pair of ancients went to a restaurant. Old Joshua's wrath for his erring partner had evaporated, as it always had evaporated, and they discussed angles of their predicament as they ate. Independence having been the order of their lives, begging a grub-stake was an act that they disliked tremendously.

The moment they were on the street again, they found themselves face to face with Dogtown Granby, and the meeting was not a chance event. The snaky meanness of the gambler passed average human understanding.

"I'm givin' you tarantulas fifteen minutes for layin' me down a long string o' tracks out o' here," he blared. "Fifteen short minutes, and you'll haf to hustle to make it."

"Go ahead and talk big," creaked Doodlebug. "You got a gun."

Granby drew the gun, held it ready, and kicked viciously at the wizened little old Henry. Landsinger would have gone at the man's throat, the menacing thirty-eight notwithstanding, had not the ever-watchful Sheriff Telford rushed between. Telford escorted the *viejos,* ashen with bitter rage under their coppery sunburn, from the danger zone. Then he went with them to a storekeeper and stood for them in the matter of supplies.

A little later the deserts' own buckled on gun and belts, mounted and rode westward with a laden pack mule following at the end of a frayed hackamore rope. Doodlebug muttered, at the edge of town:

"Lord bless that sheriff hombre. Say, big un', I know you well enough to know you ain't aimin' to let the Granby sidewinder git by with what he done."

"Skassly," replied old Joshua, taciturn once more. He lifted a bony arm and pointed to a dim line of cottonwood trees that marked the course of a cow country creek a mile or so ahead. "Som'eres hid there in the shade, little 'un, we can sleep the rest o' the day. Wish I'd had the nerve to ast that storekeeper for a can o' apricots, hod-dang it."

They rode on to the shade of the cottonwoods.

DOGTOWN GRANBY'S saloon building was big and barnlike, old and sun-blasted and sprawling. A partitioned-off room in the rear and to the left served the tyrant as an office, and most of the business transacted there was with multitudinous and murderous henchmen. There was a door leading to the saloon proper and another that opened to an alley.

The bartenders were rushed that night. The crowd was hilarious before nine o'clock. Granby sat alone in his office, smoked and listened to the innumerable sounds that filtered through to his ears, and of those sounds the only important one to him was the clanging of the cash-register bell. Suddenly he came out of his dark reverie to realize that he was looking into the muzzles of four worn Colt six-guns. And just beyond the weapons were the hard-bitten, scraggly-bearded countenances of the old-timers.

"Nary a word," Landsinger warned softly. "Doodlebug, lock that inside door. Keerless of you, polecat, not to keep yore doors locked."

In the squinted desert eyes Granby noted something that made him think of blood and steel. He went a little pale, spat his cigar, and slowly elevated his hands, Henry sprang to the inner door and shot the bolt, and hastened back and took possession of the pretty thirty-eight. The prospec-

tors had a cut-and-dried plan, one that was strikingly unique.

"So the law couldn't git anything on you," pursued Landsinger. "Well, mebbe me and Doodlebug can git somethin' on you. We owes it to Ab Telford to do it if it's possible. Move a hair the wrong way, and you'll find out you ain't bullet-proof. Now git up and come along. Hustle!"

"Wait—" Granby said. "How much dinero you want?"

Plainly, he was fighting for time. Landsinger swore and brought a gun barrel down on the head of the would-be big boss, not too hard. The saloon hilarity drowned the noise of the man's fall. Old Joshua holstered his guns, snatched up Granby's silver-buff Stetson hat and held it with the brim between his teeth—Granby would need that hat—and stooped and caught the gambler under the armpits. Doodlebug thrust the thirty-eight inside his tattered shirt and holstered his two Colts, then bent and seized the gambler by the ankles. The *viejos* then hurried the limp figure into the alley and away to thick darkness that hid their horses and laden pack mule. Quickly they bound the insensible captive across a saddle and set out westward, one of them walking.

The rest of that night and two hours of the next day they traveled, the old-timers walking and riding by turns. Granby had soon recovered consciousness; he had been placed upright in the saddle, with a rawhide thong holding his wrists securely behind him and his ankles bound by a short length of rope under the horse's belly. He'd tried to buy his captors off, begged, threatened, and finally had lapsed into the most lurid and futile of profanity.

Joshua Landsinger and Doodlebug Henry had a shack, a picturesque patchwork of mud and poles, odds and ends of boards and tin, at a seep-spring oasis in the hilly heart of the vast Seguaro Desert. There was ordinarily enough grass for their three head of livestock, a few *palo verdes*, and an ironwood or so. Tales of a great, lost gold lode had brought them to the Seguaro a year before. They hadn't been long in deciding that the lode was a myth.

Although Dogtown Granby was a Westerner born, he'd had little experience with hills and none at all with deserts. The eternal brooding silence terrified him, a fact which he concealed with some difficulty, when he could conceal it. His wilting later would have seemed pitiful in a man whose make-up was leavened by a shred or so of decency. In Granby the wilting was ludicrous.

In mid-afternoon of the first broiling-hot day, the gambler asked bluntly: "What're you aimin' to do with me?"

They were in the hut, and he was looking at Henry. Doodlebug glanced at his partner. "Ast the other old tarantula."

Landsinger pushed his slouch hat to the back of his unkempt, grizzled head, raked perspiration from his parchmentlike brow, and assumed a pseudo-judicial air. He proceeded with his and Henry's cut-and-dried plan:

"The law couldn't git anything on you, Dogtown, but me and Doodlebug can, mebbe. I reckon we'd as well have yore trial now; good a time as any. I'll be the judge. Doodlebug will be the prosecutin' lawyer. Set down on that soapbox, Dogtown, the one right behind you. Me, I'll set here."

He dropped to a crude stool at the rear end of the short, wide shelf that served as a table. Granby sank to the soapbox. It was anything but a farce to Granby. There was about the rats a set, iron grimness that made him afraid.

"But I ain't got anybody representin' me," he blurted.

"Don't make no diffunce," coldly replied old Joshua. With the butt of a six-gun he rapped on the shelf-table. "This here court will now come to order. Uh-Mr. Henry, present the indictments agin the accused."

Wizened little Doodlebug rose from the edgewise saddle in a corner, and began sternly:

"Yore Honor, the pris'ner is charged with crooked card-playin', loanin' money knowin' he was goin' to win it back, hirin' killers to do mudder for him, hirin' rustlers, mortgagin' right and left and danged near bankruptin' the city o' Mesquit Bend and the county o' Red Rock—aw, hell, yore Honor, I'm out o' breath—ain't that enough?"

"No," said Landsinger, "it ain't. He cheated two pore old tarantulas out o' their grubstake, and he kicked one o' the said tarantulas and tried to kick the other—yeah, with a gun in his paw—and gives 'em fifteen minutes for layin' him down a long string o' tracks away from there. Keerful, Dogtown! Anything you say will be used agin you, as shore as—"

Granby went to his feet, interrupting: "Say, Landsinger, I—"

"Contempt!" shouted the tall ancient. "Contempt of court! Dogtown Granby, I hereby sentences you to stay in this desert until sech time as all o' them mortgages becomes—uh, null and void—" He had very hazy ideas about this—"and until the town and county has outgrowed yore devilment, and Ab Telford has cleaned out the last o' yore Border scrapin's without any hinderance from you—a snake with its head cut off ain't much snake, y'see. Now you listen further:

"You'll work whilst yo're here, diggin' with pick and shovel, minin', startin' at sunup tomorrow. Think we'd feed you for nothin'? Skassly! Git loose from us? I or Doodlebug'll be gyardin' you day and night. It ain't likely that any o' yore gang would think about you bein' 'way out here. You, Doodlebug, listen. If Dog makes a tricky move, we drills him. Little 'un, you unnerstands, don't you?"

"Shore, big 'un," Henry nodded, faced Granby. "I throwed yore purty thirty-eight away, Dog. Don't try to find it."

WHEN breakfast was over on the following morning, the gambler was escorted to a square of rugged terrain, each corner of which was marked by a warped gray stake, within revolver shot of both the hut and the seep-spring. As the trio drew up, Granby looked narrowly at his captors, then scowled at the pick and shovel that they had dropped at his feet. Henry drawled:

"This here is the only claim me and Joshaway ever bothered to stake and register in the Seguaro, Dogtown. A year ago, it was. We found some color, but if they was much o' the yaller, she laid deep, and the sun was hot and the ground baked and rocky. But yo're a heap younger'n us, and you won't mind the hard diggin'."

"No? Guess again," bit out the tidewater Westerner.

But on the next day Granby worked. He had to in order to eat. This was his wilting. And on the next day it was the same, and the next. Moreover, he had become interested in his work. He ceased to curse the heat that drew perspiration from every pore of his body and grimed him with a thin caking of dust, ceased to be concerned over the pick-handle and shovel-handle blisters in his broad palms. A rest period of two hours, granted him by the *viejos* because of the broiling sun, seemed more torture to him than the labor.

At sunset, Granby came in acting queerly in spite of himself. It was not difficult to see that he was a man with some unusual weight on his mind. Landsinger and Henry exchanged sly glances. Although the old-timers hadn't been keeping very close to the gambler, except at night when they guarded him in order to prevent his escape, they had watched him closely. Doodlebug hitched up his two sagging gunbelts and began to put supper on the shelf-table. Old Joshua fingered his scraggly beard and drawled, as though more to make talk than for any other reason:

"Find any yaller today, Dogtown?"

"Found nothin' but the same old rock and dirt," came sullenly.

"Thought I seen you coverin' up somethin' out there on the claim, hidin' somethin'," Landsinger muttered. "Could 'a' been mistook, o' course."

Doodlebug Henry swore creakingly at the coffee-pot handle for being hot, then inquired: "Ever hear o' the lost Seguaro lode, Dogtown?"

"Never did," said Granby.

He lied. That lost lode, popularly supposed to be worth millions, had become a part of tradition in the West.

"Hold supper," bluntly ordered Landsinger.

He left the shack, hurried toward the claim and the newest of the holes that Granby had dug. After ten minutes he returned, and his lined face was a hard mask now. The gambler eyed him narrowly as he crossed the earthen threshold. The voice of old Joshua was as hard as his face:

"You found somethin', Dogtown, all right. Why didn't you tell me when I ast you?"

"Not—not the lode!" gasped Doodlebug. "Right here at our door, after we'd hunted—"

Landsinger interrupted, almost purring: "Hombres, le's eat supper."

The three sat down and ate, the gambler wolfing his food and watching the rats covertly. Trying to snatch one of their guns entailed too much risk; they were quick with their hardware and quick-tempered. The twilight deepened. Henry lighted a tallowdip and stuck it deftly to the back side of the shelf that served as a table. Dusk welled upward from the desert hollows. There was the distant and lonesome yapping of a coyote, the lazy stamping of hoofs down near the spring.

Granby, who now sat on a box low in the shadows, lifted his tousled head into the range of yellow candlelight and spoke. "Yeah, Landsinger, I did find somethin' out there. Heavy gold ore by the barrel. You and Henry won't want to bother with developin' the mine, so why not sell out to me? I'll give you twenty thousand."

Old Jushua and wizened little Doodlebug laughed in unison. "Haw, haw, haw, haw—twenty thousand!" Landsinger sobered, and continued: "I got us a name for the mine. The 'Blue Ghost.' She sounds right purty to me."

"Shore," agreed Doodlebug. "She's plum' bootiful. Why, Dog, I and Joshaway could blow twenty thousand on one rampage."

Granby did not repeat his offer, not then. Plainly, he was doing some hard thinking. . . . If the claim hadn't been registered—but it had been. Probably only Landsinger and Henry knew the exact location of the stake. Were it not for this, the stakes could be moved and the claim registered all over again in his own name. There were those who would make good guesses, in the event that the rats—er, vanished completely. True enough, but guesses were not admitted as evidence in law courts. Granby did not doubt that this was the far-famed Seguaro lode.

The three bedded themselves down as usual, which is to say that the gambler lay on a blanket in one end of the shack and the ancients on blankets in the other end. Landsinger was to remain awake and on guard until midnight, Henry from that time until dawn. Throughout all the dark hours a tallowdip would be burning.

But on this midnight old Joshua did not waken his partner. He wished the gambler to believe that he had fallen asleep in spite of himself. He may, or may not, have thus deceived Granby. Before long he heard a slight noise, very slight; the interior of the hut was a mass of shadow below the level of the broad shelf, and he was unable to detect movement. Then the light of the gluttering tallowdip

showed him that a hand was creeping toward it and toward a meat knife that lay beside it. His experiment had borne fruit. Granby meant to murder them while they slept.

*Bam*—old Joshua had released a six-gun's hammer. The bullet sent the knife spinning.

The hand was no longer in sight. Doodlebug sat up gripping worn black-walnut and steel. Landsinger pushed him back. Not a word was spoken.

No mention of the incident was made on the next morning, either. After early breakfast, Granby visited the claim as though to convince himself that he hadn't been dreaming, hurried to the old-timers and began to bid frenziedly for the Blue Ghost. Gold fever had grown upon him until it threatened his reason. Only when his offer included all his earthly possessions was it accepted.

"Ketch up the stock, Doodlebug," said Landsinger, "and we'll go before the Mesquit Bend magistrate and close the deal proper. Mr. Granby, you reckon you can ride a pack mule to town?"

The jubilant Mr. Granby declared that he could ride a gopher.

Late in the afternoon of that day, the three appeared in the Mesquit Bend magistrate's office and made their trade legal. Granby did not have a great amount of ready cash, but he had many thousands in mortgages on town and country property, and he had the big saloon, and these followed the money into the possession of Joshua Landsinger and Doodlebug Henry. Granby swore triumphantly as he pocketed the document that proclaimed him sole owner of the Blue Ghost. The startling news was spreading with the rapidity of fire in a powder house, and a crowd had gathered in the street outside. The gambler used a rear window as a means of hasty exit. Soon he was astride a horse and galloping toward Benson City and the home of an assayer. Sheriff Abner Telford came fighting his way through the crowd at the front.

"Wish I could 'a' been the first to congratulate you, *amigos!*" he began whole-heartedly. "You can forget about the grub-stake, too. When you tell where you made the big strike—must be the Seguaro lode—there'll shore be a rush—"

"Thanks, Ab, a heap," broke in Landsinger. "We ain't tellin' nothin', Ab. Say, I and Doodlebug has got a job for you. We're a-indorsin' these here mortgages back to the people which drawed 'em, makin' no charge a-tall—yeah, playin' Santy Claus—and we wants you to distribute 'em for us. Also, we're astin' you to hold this here cash money that Granby paid us, and the papers givin' us the saloon."

Telford was struck speechless. It really was an amazing thing.

The main street of Mesquit Bend held a milling throng of townsmen and men from outlying ranches before the night was an hour old. These tried very hard to show their gratitude and appreciation when they'd been convinced that there was no proverbial string to the gift. They dined and wined the *viejos* repeatedly. At ten o'clock, the star actors in the impromptu celebration were declining even tinned apricots; at one, the best of bottled goods had lost favor with them; at two, they were carried gently into the hotel and gently put to bed, to sleep the clock around and considerably more.

Sunset found them up, dressed, and in conference. They proceeded to the sheriff's office when the conference was over.

"Ab," said Landsinger, "though Granby beat us out o' grub-stake money, kicked me and tried to kick Doodlebug, and would 'a' knifed us whilst we slept if he could, we'll hafta play square with him—even him. We'll give him his saloon back and most o' that cash money; then we ain't cheated him a-tall, and ain't lied to him none, but have only fed him the rope he ast

for. Them mortgages, he got them by cheatin', and it shore ain't right for him to have them back."

Telford said: "Dogtown just got in from havin' that claim assayed, and he'd rode a hawss half to death. Mad? Oh, gosh! But I reckon there ain't anything he can do about it, because all you sold him was a claim. You might tell me now, Landsinger: was the Seguaro lode iron pyrites, fools' gold?"

Old Joshua shook his grizzled head. "I don't think they is any sech lode, Ab. Wasn't no fools' gold on that claim, nary speck. Say, them mortgages goin' home to roost ort to put spirit in people; ain't no danger o' Dogtown foreclosin' on 'em now, y'see."

"Put spirit in people!" echoed the officer. "Old-timer, you said it. After you two was put to bed last night, a big bunch o' cowpokes and ranchers drove all o' Granby's low-down friends —except the two bartenders—clean into Mexico and warned 'em to stay there. The town's been so quiet—"

"Fire!" yelled a man who stood in the doorway of a nearby store. "The saloon's afire!"

"By thunder, Dogtown's done that for spite!" exclaimed Telford.

That was a good guess, if guess it may be called. Granby, beaten and desperate, had no means of knowing that he was destroying property that was to have been returned to him. The old dry frame building was fast becoming a mass of roaring flames. Doubtless kerosene had been used in setting the fire. Quickly scores of people gathered in the street to watch. Landsinger and Henry hurried around to the rear in the forlorn hope that they might be able to effect an entrance there and salvage at least one keg, and ran abruptly into Dogtown Granby and his bartender henchmen. Each of the villainous trio was armed. In half-insane rage, the gambler cried above the crackling of the flames:

"Drag iron, you tarantulas!"

He had his new gun out of holster leather before he spoke. But with that, the five of them drew in the same second, and in the same split second began to shoot. The guns of the desert men were like a pair of Gatlings, and they were accurate. When the Mesquit Bend sheriff turned a rear corner of the doomed building with a crowd at his heels, Granby and his companions lay face-downward in the sand, as dead as they would ever be. The old-timers had vanished; they were on their way to the doctor to have their wounds, lead burns, looked after.

"No witnesses, and it'll save the commonwealth the expense of a trial if we calls this a plain case o' triple suicide," bluntly said Telford.

Early next morning, Landsinger and Henry appeared in front of the sheriff's office. They had their horses and pack mule and were ready to start for their patchwork desert shack. Abner Telford hurried out to them.

"You can pay for them sidewinders' funerals out o' the Granby money, Ab," drawled Landsinger. "Y'see, we're keepin' only what the assayer says the claim is wo'th. She was a rich pocket, but only a pocket; she was a blue ghost for Dogtown, all right. I and Doodlebug diskivered her a year ago, and had been holdin' her to pay for our buryin' when we cashed. Planned the thing right purty, didn't we? Dogtown bein' from tidewater Texas, we figgered he didn't know a heap about gold, and he didn't. We showed him where to dig, o' course. So long, Ab, and good luck to you!"

"Wait!" exclaimed the officer. "You two don't haf to work any more. Lots o' people has already spoke for the privilege o' keepin' you as long as you live. Take them hawsses and that balaam back to the livery stable."

But they wouldn't. No so-called civilization for them. They mounted stiffly and went riding into the west, leading the plodding pack mule; into the west, toward the golden silence and brooding peace of their desert.

# GUN JUSTICE

*By Paul Evan Lehman*

**There could be only one man in the whole country who would call a rich gold strike the "Golden Lily." And he was now missing, had been for ten years. His son found another man, Sutton Perry, in possession of the wealth. . . . Settlement would undoubtedly require skill—with a six-gun.**

## CHAPTER I

### *The Golden Lily Mine*

SUTTON PERRY lounged negligently in the doorway that led from his general store and post office into his Oasis Saloon and tried to estimate from the size of the crowd the amount of gold flowing into his coffers.

Minted gold, some of it, but mostly dust, for this was mining country; and the size of the stream would have satisfied any ordinary man who earned his living by fairly honest means. But Sutton Perry was not an ordinary man, and it was a matter of no consequence to him whether he made his living by fair means or foul. Rather, he inclined toward the latter, for if one were as shrewd and cautious as this Sutton Perry, the risk was not too great and the gain infinitely greater.

He stirred at the sound of footsteps on the board floor of the store to his left; then at sight of the man who had just come in from the street he straightened and turned his back on the saloon and gaming activities.

"Hello, Sam," he said heartily. "How goes the grubbing in Mother Earth?"

Sam Baynard stood just inside the street door. The light from the single hanging lamp accentuated the sparkle in his eyes, brought out very clearly the tight muscles of chin and jaw and the tenseness of the thin, bloodless lips. It required no second look to tell Sutton Perry that the man before him was laboring under the stress of great excitement, poorly suppressed.

Sam Baynard ignored the salutation as though he had not heard it.

"I've got a letter to mail," he said, jerking the words from between his lips. "It's important. Want you to take care of it yoreself, Sut. See that

it gits off on the mornin' stage. You will, won't you?"

Perry walked forward and extended his hand. "Sure I will, Sam. Writing the folks again?"

"Yes; writin' 'em again. Mebbe—mebbe they'll answer—this one."

Perry, still smiling, took the letter, casually scanned the superscription, and, walking behind the counter, pushed it into a pigeon-hole in the rack behind the mail window.

"Won't overlook it there," he reassured the staring Baynard. "Bound to catch my eye. Come over to the saloon, Sam, and have a drink."

Baynard shook his head. "No, not tonight, Sut. I'm ridin' right out again. Don't forgit that letter, Sut. I—somethin' jest seems to tell me that I'll git an answer to it."

"I'll not forget it, Sam."

Perry nodded pleasantly as Baynard hurried through the doorway into the night. He stood there listening, the smile frozen on his lips, until the hoofbeats of Baynard's horse were smothered in the bedlam of sound from the saloon on the other side of the partition.

"Kinda anxious about that letter, ain't he?"

Sutton Perry started and slowly turned his head. The voice had come from the shadows back of the pot-bellied stove.

"I didn't know you were there," Perry said curtly. "Of course he is anxious. Been writing to his wife every month for the past year without receiving any answer. For some reason he believes this letter will bring one."

"Uh-huh."

Bill Kehoe, claim-jumper, gun artist, and all-around badman, got lazily to his feet and stretched; then he pulled his six-gun to the proper position and looked at Perry through narrowed, deceptively mild eyes.

"Been takin' a little snooze back in the corner. You all done woke me up. . . . Well, I reckon I'll be amblin' along. Danged if I can keep my eyes open. S'long, Sut; and—don't forgit that letter."

He grinned sardonically at the frowning Perry and slouched through the doorway. A moment later Perry heard the roll of hoofs that told of a mighty quick getaway for a man as sleepy as Bill Kehoe had appeared.

Sutton Perry acted quickly. He glided to the front door, closed and barred it, then shut and bolted the one that led to the saloon. Mounting a chair, he extinguished the hanging lamp, and in the darkness felt his way behind the counter and withdrew from the rack the letter that had been entrusted to him.

In the little kitchen at the rear of the store, Perry drew down the shades and lighted a small kerosene lamp. Hastily, with fingers that trembled, he ripped open the envelope and withdrew the letter. It consisted of a few dozen words scrawled with pencil in characters that was so shaky as to be almost illegible.

Perry read swiftly, and as he progressed his eyes grew wide and staring, and his fingers shook until they threatened to tear the cheap paper they clutched so tightly.

"God!" he said chokingly. "It's what I've been waiting for! He's struck it! And now he's writing for them to join him—describes the location of the Golden Lily so that a kid could find it. What luck!"

He straightened slowly and gazed at the wall before him. But at that moment he was not seeing the soot grime from oil lamp and wood stove, or the cracks in the logs where the chinking had fallen away. In his mind's eye he was gazing at a saddlelike ridge between two tall peaks in the Sawtooth Mountains. At its base he could envision a group of rough board buildings, clustered close to a yawning opening that ran back into the saddlelike ridge. From the entrance to this mine rolled cars laden with high-grade ore; men were com-

ing and going; stamp mills thundered.

"The Golden Lily," murmured Sutton Perry, and the words were like honey on his lips. "I'll keep that name; I like it."

He wrenched his thoughts back to the present and glanced at the letter he was holding. With a sudden, swift movement, he tore it in half; then, thinking better of it, held the pieces over the lamp chimney until they caught. Raising the stove lid, he dropped the blazing pieces inside and tossed the envelope after them. He watched until every shred of paper was consumed, then stirred the ashes until not a hint of a written word remained.

"Lucky I held out those other letters," he mused. "Wife and kid. Well, they'll never know. Just as well for them—they can be content on their little cow ranch. Never learn what happened to the roaming husband and father." He laughed shortly. "Knew from the first that he was on the verge of a find. Tried to make friends with him, but he wouldn't mix with anybody. Good thing for me. If somebody else was to suspect—"

He jerked erect at a sudden thought, and the rich blood that had brightened his cheeks drained so abruptly from his face as to leave it pinched and white. He had just remembered Bill Kehoe's presence in the store. Kehoe was a claim-jumper—a gold-wolf with nostrils that could scent a strike in the very air that surrounded a lucky miner. And Kehoe had started after Baynard!

Sutton Perry knew what that meant. Lacking the location of the mine, Kehoe would follow Sam to the Golden Lily, then, after assuring himself that there were no witnesses, he would kill the unlucky Baynard and take his claim. And since Perry had himself destroyed Sam's letter, nobody would appear to contest Kehoe's possession.

Perry snatched up a rifle that stood in a corner. He had never killed a man in his life, finding it much simpler to hire somebody to do it for him; but in this instance there must be no one to share his secret. Hurriedly he crammed some cartridges into his pocket and made for the rear door. Back of the store was a stable. He almost ran through the entrance. Leaning the rifle against a wall, he found his saddle and bridle and threw them on a horse, working quickly in the darkness.

Three minutes later he was threading his way down an alley that led to the open range outside of town. In one particular he had an advantage over Kehoe—he knew the exact location of the mine. Bill would have to follow Baynard, depending on the miner to lead him.

Dawn was breaking and Perry had covered many miles when it happened. Riding warily now, he saw an indistinct figure top a rise some hundred yards ahead and immediately after it, another. Five second later he, too, rode over the ridge; and as he did so he saw the flash of a gun and heard two distinct reports. . . .

Down in the little hollow below him where the shooting had occurred, it was still too dark for Perry to distinguish the forms of the men. But the flash he had seen must have come from the one in front—Sam Baynard. The stab of orange flame from Kehoe's gun was, of course, hidden from Perry by the claim-jumper's body. Both men had shot; the double report told him that.

Sutton Perry rode cautiously forward. Almost subconsciously he was telling himself that fate could not have staked the cards more favorably for him. Kehoe was a dead shot; it would seem that he had removed Baynard right in the shadow of his own mine. Perry clutched the rifle tightly. If his luck held he could remove Kehoe, and the law would praise rather than condemn him.

Perry pulled up abruptly and swung the rifle to his shoulder. Ahead of

him a vague form loomed—the figure of a mounted man. Perry, his heart beating rapidly, pressed the trigger. The blood was thumping in his ears so loudly that he scarcely heard the flat *spang* of the rifle.

He saw the dim form sway forward, heard an alarmed curse; then came the rapid drum of hoofs and the mounted man vanished in the gloom ahead.

Perry pumped his Winchester in frantic haste, cursing at the nervousness which had caused him but to wound where he had meant to kill. His shots must have gone wide, for he was firing blindly and there was no break in the rhythmic beat of hoofs. . . .

The hammer clicked on empty chamber, and Perry feverishly reloaded. By the time his shaking fingers had filled the magazine, the sound of the rapidly running horse had been swallowed by distance.

Perry got from his horse and, leading the animal, walked cautiously forward. Twenty yards he covered, then his nervous horse refused to be led any farther. Perry found a stunted tree and tied the animal. Cautiously he moved ahead another dozen yards.

He came to a huddled figure lying in the trail and went to his knees beside it. Rolling the inert form on its back, he struck a match. The man was Sam Baynard.

Even as he looked, Perry saw the lids flicker open—saw Baynard staring up into his face.

"It's me, Sam," said Perry quickly. "Somebody shot you, old-timer, and I got here a little too late."

The wounded man spoke with effort. "Caught him—follerin' me. Who —was it—Sut?"

"Bill Kehoe, I think. He was sitting in a chair behind the stove and saw you give me the letter. You're a poor actor, Sam. He recognized the symptoms of a strike and trailed you. I suspected him and followed. I was a bit too late, but I wounded him. I'll see that the law gets him for this, Sam."

"My cabin—jest a bit—farther on. Git me—to it."

Perry frowned in the gloom. Perhaps Sam's wound was not mortal. Again the wolf in him prompted. Baynard must not live. He himself would look after the wound. A little infection—no medical treatment . . .

"Get you right over, Sam," he said soothingly.

He raised the wounded man in his arms, murmuring words of encouragement as Baynard groaned with pain, and staggered over to the tied horse. The animal shied, but Perry managed to get Baynard across the saddle. Then, leading the horse, he made his way down the trail to a little cut-off, turned into that, and came finally to a cabin at the foot of the saddlelike ridge.

He carried the man, now unconscious, into the shack and dropped him on a bunk. Quickly he examined the wound, and what he found brought a light of evil anticipation to his face. Sam Baynard's hours were numbered.

Perry bathed the dying man's face with cold water, restoring consciousness after a while. Baynard's eyes were clear as he looked into the somber countenance above him. He spoke distinctly, but slowly.

"I'm—due—to cash—Sut?"

Perry answered with apparent reluctance. "I don't know, Sam. Maybe not. It's pretty bad, though; through the chest."

"I know. I'm a goner, Sut. Yo've been white, and I'm goin'—to trust you. That letter was—to my wife. I've been a roamer, Sut. Always had—a itchy foot. Cattle business—too slow. Started out two years ago—to find gold. Left wife and kid. He's —fourteen—now. Found signs a year ago and wrote to tell 'em. Been writin' —ever since, but they—ain't answered. In this last letter I told 'em—my hunch was right. It's there, Sut, in

the Golden Lily. Told 'em to sell ranch—and come out. Sut, yo'll look—after them? They'll—make it right—with you."

Perry nodded gravely. "Forget the reward. Of course I'll look after them. Have you filed on the claim, Sam?"

"Yes."

Perry's face did not betray his sudden concern. His fertile mind, working at lightning speed, had already found the remedy. His voice was smooth.

"Then it would be best to will the mine to them in writing, Sam. They are unknown here, and you've never confided in anybody. A written will would make their inheritance certain."

Sam nodded feebly. "Write her out, Sut. I'm gettin'—sorta weak."

Quickly Sutton Perry moved across the room to the table. He remembered that when he had lit the lamp he had seen a cheap tablet and a pencil there. For a few minutes he wrote rapidly, then brought the written sheet and the pencil to the side of the dying man. Baynard was lying with closed eyes, breathing heavily.

"Listen, Sam," said Perry hastily. "I'll read it to you:

> I, Samuel Baynard, being in sound mind and memory, do hereby give and bequeath to my wife and son my mine, which I have named the Golden Lily, and which is located by records on file in the office of the Recorder of Calder County.

Baynard opened his eyes and slowly extended his hand. Perry put the pencil between his fingers, and, holding the document against a tin plate, steadied the hand of the dying man. Feebly, laboriously, Sam Baynard's fingers traced the outlines of the letters that spelled his name; then with a long sigh, he allowed his arm to drop to the bunk.

"Yo're—white, Sut," he said in a whisper. "Yo're—a friend. God—will—reward . . ."

The whisper grew fainter, trailed into nothingness. . . .

Sutton Perry sat by the bunk, his greed-hungered eyes on the face of the man he had betrayed. For a long time he sat thus, then nodded in satisfaction and got to his feet. Carefully he folded the paper and placed it in a breast pocket, then went outside and mounted his horse.

His carriage was erect and jaunty, his eyes shone with new-born power, as he jogged back through the early morning hours toward the Oasis.

That paper which he had read to the dying man contained every word he had uttered except "wife and son." Instead, he had written in bold letters that he knew the dying man would not see, the name, Sutton L. Perry.

His vision of a stream of gold pouring from the mountainside was about to become a reality. In its contemplation Perry entirely forgot the last significant words from the lips of Sam Baynard: "God—will—reward . . ."

## CHAPTER II

### *Rustler Pass*

COLE BAYNARD rode out of a narrow defile in the mountains and halted his roan cow-pony abruptly.

He made a rather striking picture as he sat there, silent and watchful. The black Stetson had been drawn down over the crisp, curly blond hair, but the gray eyes that peered from beneath its brim were level and searching, the smooth-shaven cheeks were carved in lines that bespoke firmness of will, the rather square jaw told of a determination that would carry its owner through those obstacles that could not be surmounted. A slightly hooked nose lent an air of grimness to the otherwise handsome features. The fact that he was tall and lean and sunbrowned but emphasized the strength that was shown in his face. His clothes were

those of the cowboy, simple and serviceable.

Now the level gray eyes were narrowed at sight of what lay ahead and a bit below him.

Angling toward the mouth of the pass where Cole Baynard sat his motionless horse there was an awkwardly running bunch of cattle. Steers they were, well fattened and not more than three years old. At point, swing, and drag, riders swung ropes and "yipped" in the shrill voice the animals understood.

But it was not the cattle that held Baynard's attention. Behind the little herd, strung out in a thin line and shooting steadily from the backs of their horses, was a protecting line of riflemen. And a quarter-mile beyond them stretched another straggling line, the members of which were firing spasmodically and futilely at the well-organized covering party.

The story was easily read. "Rustlers," mused Cole Baynard in reluctant admiration. "And they know their business, too."

He turned his head swiftly to the left to look into the muzzle of a rifle which projected from a group of boulders. Above the extended barrel of the weapon Baynard could see a bulbous nose and a pair of piercing black eyes, surmounted by a disreputable gray John B hat.

"Set tight, bud," came the steady command. "This ain't yore party."

Cole Baynard shrugged and carefully reached for his breast pocket and the tobacco tag which dangled from it.

"No, I reckon it ain't," he said calmly, and proceeded to roll a smoke.

"When you git that quirly made," said the bandit, "knee yore hawss over clost to this rock. Them cows is apt to come into the pass on the run."

Baynard licked the finished cigarette, flicked a match into flame with his thumb-nail, and did as he was ordered. The man with the rifle stood up in order to watch him better, and Cole saw that he was big and burly, with a curling black beard and purple-veined cheeks to match the bulbous nose.

The sound of the covering fire grew nearer, then the cattle swept into the pass and thundered by. The guards drew together in the mouth of the gap and, dismounting, proceeded to throw lead at their pursuers.

Cole, smoking quietly, waited until his captor, after a quick glance across the valley floor, ordered his men to cease firing.

"They got their bellies full," growled the rustler chief. "And we got fifty head o' prime beef. Dam' little, considerin', but I reckon it'll give Sut Perry somethin' more to think about."

He turned his scowling countenance toward Baynard.

"You can git goin' now, and when you hit town hunt up Sut Perry and give him a message from me. Tell him that Bill Kehoe sent his regards, and tell him I'll be comin' back for more jest as soon as I git rid o' these."

Cole nodded shortly and allowed his level eyes to roam carefully over Kehoe's person. The outlaw laughed harshly.

"Take a good look," he sneered. "Likely yo'll know me again. Well, that ain't worryin' me none. Sut Perry is the only one hereabouts to be scared of, and I got him where he's cornered. Git goin', pilgrim. Don't forgit to deliver that message, and don't forgit the name—Bill Kehoe."

Baynard touched the roan with his spurs and rode him through the group of rustlers at the mouth of the pass. It was a villainous crew. Dirty, desperate, hard-bitten men, all of them. Cole wondered a bit that they had let him go scot free, then remembered the message and Kehoe's apparent scorn of the law. Some personal feud, this. And the rustler chief had wanted the man named Sut Perry to know what had become of his steers.

A half-mile ahead of him, young

Baynard could see the horsemen who had been chasing the rustlers. They had gathered in a cluster about a man who was lying upon the ground. Cole saw them turn to watch warily as he approached, and he caught the glint of sun on rifle barrel as one of the party covered him. He rode on steadily, halting at last upon a command from the man with the rifle.

"Who are you, and where you goin'?" came the sharp question.

The man who addressed him was squat and beetle-browed. His lips were full and heavy, and the lower one sagged as though in continual petulance. On his open vest flashed the star of a sheriff.

"I'm on my way to town," said Cole Baynard quietly. "Came through the pass in time to run into a bunch of men hazin' some steers. I figgered they were rustlers."

"Yo're right good at figgerin'. How come they let you through?"

"One of them gave me a message for a man named Sut Perry. I reckon I'll find him in the town ahead."

"Yeah, I reckon you will," was the dry retort. "What for lookin' jasper was this fella that give you the message?"

"Big man with a black beard," answered Cole shortly. He didn't like this particular officer of the law.

"Uh-huh. That's him. Damn his hide, I'll git him if it takes every man in the county!"

His repulsive face had gone purple with rage, and the lower lip sagged until the teeth were exposed. He flashed a glance toward Baynard.

"It's funny they didn't take yore gun. You better ride back with me, fella. If you want to see Mr. Perry, I'll take you right to him."

He turned to issue orders concerning the wounded man, then motioned a lanky deputy to accompany them to town. Cole grinned slightly. This sheriff was acting very much as though he expected Baynard to make a break.

The sheriff and his deputy mounted and rode their horses to where Cole had halted.

"Trail us, Slim," snapped the sheriff.

The deputy flashed a wondering look at his chief, then obediently reined his horse to the rear.

The distance to town was comparatively short, and they covered it in an hour. At first the suspicious sheriff tried questioning Baynard, but seeing that his questions received scant reply, followed at last by none at all, he desisted. But his eyes were glinting, and the lower lip sagged forebodingly.

The town was not a pretentious one in size, but the quality of the buildings was somewhat better than Cole had seen in his long ride through the cow country. Besides the dwelling houses there were a big general store, a livery barn, a rather stately frame courthouse, a half-dozen saloons, and a new bank. From the sign on the latter Cole learned that the town was called Perryville. Evidently the man to whom his message was directed was a person of considerable importance. He was soon to learn that Sutton Perry's influence carried much farther than the town upon which he had bestowed his name.

The sheriff led the way to a hitching-rack in front of an imposing two-story building of imported brick, which, judged by cow country standards, was a veritable mansion. Here the sheriff dismounted and curtly motioned for Baynard to do likewise. Leaving the deputy with the horses, the officer ordered Cole up the steps, across the veranda, and to the open door.

Watching Baynard closely, the sheriff rapped on the door frame with the barrel of his Colt. There was a moment's silence, then at the end of the dim hall Cole saw a door open, and a girl came to the entrance. He had a fleeting glimpse of a pair of big violet eyes in a face that was a bit

pinched and somehow pathetic; then he was following the slight form across the hall to a door on the right.

The girl knocked timidly. "Sheriff Cain and a stranger to see you, Uncle Sutton," she said. A voice replied, and she opened the door.

Cole deliberately returned to his head the Stetson, which he had removed at sight of the girl, and stalked through the doorway, the sheriff at his heels.

A man swung around from his desk to face them. Cole saw that while he appeared to be less than fifty years old, his black hair had already gone gray above the temples. The face was lean and a bit haggard. The eyes were arrogant, and the thin lips drooped at one corner in a perpetual sneer.

"Well?" he snapped.

Sheriff Cain answered: "They got away. Snaked fifty head back into Rustler Pass. Held us off with Winchesters."

The man at the desk sprang to his feet. "Damnation, Cain! How long is this going to last? What's the matter with you? Why do you think I put you in office? It's got to stop! You hear me? It's got to stop!"

"Yeah, that's what I been sayin' too," growled the sheriff. "That dam' Bill Kehoe is jest too foxy for us, that's all. I had twelve men, Sut, and dam' if he didn't show up with twenty. Where he gits 'em I don't know."

Sutton Perry sat down, and when he spoke again his voice was tight.

"I've just been figuring up, Cain. Do you know how many head of stock Kehoe has run off this range in the past year? Nearly two thousand! You hear me? *Two thousand!* In addition, he's raided the saloons and store and robbed the bank. And you wonder where he gets his men. Hell's bells! He could hire an army with the proceeds of his loot! I'll be ruined in no time if this keeps up. And we haven't even laid hands on one of his mangy crew."

"Mebbe we have," said the sheriff significantly. "This jigger come ridin' out o' the pass jest after Kehoe's men rode in. Said he was held up and given a message for you."

"A message? What was it, fellow?"

Cole answered briefly. "A big man with a black beard held me under his rifle while his crew drove the cattle into the pass. When he turned me loose he told me to hunt up a man named Sut Perry and tell him that Bill Kehoe had sent his regards, and that he was comin' back for more cattle as soon as he got rid of the ones he just took."

"The whelp of Satan!" said Perry bitterly. "Cain, swear in fifty more deputies—a hundred if you need them. This thing has come to a showdown. Post a reward of five thousand dollars for Bill Kehoe—dead."

His burning eyes came back to Baynard. "Who are you?"

"Some folks call me Cole," drawled the level-eyed young man.

"Well, Cole, you can—"

"But that's just my first name," continued Baynard calmly. "Only my friends call me that. The last name is Baynard."

"All right, Bay—"

Sutton Perry stopped abruptly, and the angry blood receded from his face. His glinting eyes widened, then narrowed. The thin lips snapped shut tightly. His mind sped back over the ten years that had passed since he had looked into the dead face of another Baynard. They had been years of hustle and bustle and rampant greed. Years in which the Golden Lily mine had been developed and finally sold to a syndicate for a fortune.

During that whole time the name Baynard had haunted him. There was always the memory of that fourteen-year-old boy who would some day become a man. Those last words of Sam Baynard's, "God will reward," had assumed a significance that at first had been overlooked. But with

the sale of his interests and his removal to this remote part of the state, Perry had dismissed his fears. He had repeatedly told himself that even were the son of the dead man to trace the elder Baynard to the little mining community where the Golden Lily had been located, the younger Baynard could not possibly prove Sutton Perry guilty of wrongdoing.

Sut held Sam Baynard's last will and testament, over what was undoubtedly the miner's genuine signature. On the face of things, Perry had intervened in Sam's behalf, wounding his assailant and caring for the stricken Baynard until death had claimed him. Was it not logical, then, that Sam, estranged from his wife and child, would seek to reward Perry for his apparently honest effort to save his life? So, to Perry, it had seemed. The fact that neither wife nor child had received word from Baynard about the mine would argue that Sam had cut himself off from them entirely.

So Sutton Perry had lulled his fears, only to have them awaken again at sight of a young cowpuncher who informed him that his name was Baynard, and who seemed to be staring at him accusingly with level gray eyes.

Perry hitched his body in the chair and cleared his throat with a little rasping sound.

"I—a little attack of dizziness. Suffer from it occasionally. You say your name is Bayman?"

"Baynard—Cole Baynard."

"Of course. Baynard, you're quite a young man—twenty-two?"

"Twenty-four."

There was no longer any doubt in Sutton Perry's mind. Sam Baynard's boy had been fourteen, and ten years had passed. He spoke, more to be saying something than because he had anything to say: "Are you planning to stay in Perryville long?"

"No. Haven't been stayin' long in any one place. A dozen years ago my father left the ranch in Texas and went prospectin'. Mother and me never heard from him. I've been tryin' to locate him."

"Indeed! Have you had any luck?"

"None so far. Cain't seem to get a trace of him anywhere."

Sutton Perry breathed a deep sigh of relief. He felt sure that the boy did not suspect him—could not suspect him. With this knowledge came the assurance that had left him so abruptly. He smiled.

"I wish you'd stay," he said courteously. "I think I can find something for you, and meanwhile I will try to get some word regarding your father. Fortunately my influence is such that I have access to information that would be denied you. . . . Esther!"

The girl with the violet eyes entered the room. "Yes, Uncle Sutton?"

"Esther, this is Mr. Baynard. He's staying with us for a while. Now no excuses, Baynard. There is no hotel in town, and I want you to stay for a few days, anyhow. Esther, give him a nice room and show him where he can tidy up. I'm sure he's hungry; fix him something to eat. And see that one of the boys cares for his horse. Baynard, my niece will look after you."

Cole stood eyeing the man, reluctant to accept his hospitality, yet finding no adequate excuse for refusing it. His gaze flickered to the face of the girl with the violet eyes. It seemed to him that they held an appeal—an unspoken request to remain. He nodded shortly.

"Thanks, Mr. Perry. I reckon I'll stay for a day or two."

Sutton Perry sat at his desk, watching, until the door had closed behind the two. Then he turned to see Sheriff Cain staring at him incredulously.

"How do you know he ain't one o' Kehoe's gang?" asked the sheriff.

"Never mind how I know, just take my word for it that he isn't," answered Perry. "Instead, he's far more

dangerous than Kehoe can ever be. Never mind how I know that, either." He got up and paced the room for a few minutes. Suddenly he wheeled to face Cain, and his whole body was tense. "Mort, watch that man! And don't let him out of Perryville alive! You get me?"

Cain looked deep into the eyes of his chief and read there just what Perry intended he should read. He shifted his feet, and one hand dropped to the gun at his hip.

"Yeah, Sut, I getcha. Leave him to me. He won't git out—alive."

## CHAPTER III

### *A Sheriff Passes On*

COLE BAYNARD was outside the kitchen busily removing the accumulated dust and grime of a days' hard travel. There was a spotless bowl and a pitcher of clear water in the room to which he had been shown, together with scented soap and immaculate towels, but he had insisted that he would be able to do a much better job at the wash bench on the rear porch.

Now he scrubbed industriously, meanwhile thinking over the circumstances that had combined to make him the guest of a man he had instinctively disliked.

Cole was essentially a man of first impressions. The many contacts he had made on his long journey in search of his father had lent him a canny ability to analyze the humanity with which he continually rubbed elbows. A word, a look, or a gesture was usually sufficient. When Sutton Perry had first swung about in his chair and barked, "Well?" something deep within him had bristled like the hackles on a dog's neck. The suavity and apparent courtesy with which he had been asked to remain a guest of the Perry household had done nothing to allay this feeling of dislike. Somehow the rather exaggerated politeness of Perry had had an insincere ring.

But he had stayed, and Cole, seeking the explanation, was forced to acknowledge that it lay in a pair of violet eyes that looked at him almost pleadingly from a pinched but lovely face. That look had intrigued him; it had almost said, "Stay—I am alone and afraid; I need you."

Cole finished washing and was combing his hair with his fingertips when the voice of Sutton Perry came to him from the kitchen. Perry was speaking to his niece, and the words were not intended for Cole's ears. The unctuous note that had been present in Perry's voice when he directed her to care for the traveler was entirely missing now.

"Since when has it become necessary to put on a clean dress in order to cook supper? Better climb out of it and get to work on the kitchen floor. Why don't you keep things clean around here. Where is Baynard?"

Cole stiffened. The kitchen floor, as he remembered it, was spotless. He could not hear the girl's answer, her voice was pitched so low. He guessed that she was warning her uncle that their visitor was outside. At any rate, the timbre of Perry's voice had altered suddenly when next he spoke:

"Why, now, little girl, I was only fooling. I'd like to catch you scrubbing the floor! That dress, though—fading, isn't it? When you get through with the dishes, go over to the store and pick out another. Tell Harper to charge it to me. Now fix something good for Baynard. He's a fine young man, and I'm going to take quite an interest in him."

The voice died away as he left the room, and a minute later Baynard entered. The girl glanced toward him apprehensively, her cheeks flushed and the violet eyes troubled. Cole smiled disarmingly.

"Ma'am, you oughtn't go to so much bother for me. Shucks! I've been ridin' the grub line so long that bacon and beans taste like chicken to me."

The girl smiled. "There is no reason why you shouldn't have a good meal. Uncle Sutton always keeps plenty of everything on hand."

Cole drew up a chair and started to eat.

"I noticed this town is called Perryville," he said. "Yore Uncle Sutton have anything to do with namin' it?"

The girl dropped into a chair across the table from him. "Yes, he built and named it. He settled here eight or nine years ago. There was nobody in this section then but a few scattered cattlemen. Uncle Sutton bought them out and went into the stock-raising business."

"I reckon he's a right important man," observed Perry thoughtfully. "Not only in town, but in the county, too."

The girl nodded, and to Cole the nod seemed a bit hopeless. "The county, like the town, bears his name," she said. "Everything is Perry: Perry County, Perryville, Perry Creek, and Perry Valley."

"Sorta likes hisself, don't he?" Cole said it with a grin, so as not to give offense.

The girl explained: "The names are just local, of course. This section is really marked on the state maps as Ocatilla County. Uncle Sutton didn't like the name, so he surveyed this part of it and renamed it Perry County."

Cole glanced up sharply. "Then it ain't a duly recognized county. The sheriff, for instance, can't be a regularly elected officer."

"According to Uncle Sutton's ideas, he is. An election is held, and his candidate is always victorious. The regular state law does not bother with us here. Uncle Sutton was elected judge. He sits on all cases and pronounces sentence."

Baynard pushed back his plate and stared at her across the table. His gray eyes were narrowed, the face muscles a bit tense. He was thinking just then that this man, Sutton Perry, must consider himself something of a little tin god. And Cole didn't like tin gods.

The girl was watching him, and when she spoke it was as though she were answering a question. "In this country, might makes right. And Uncle Sutton is just—in his way."

"Yeah, I reckon he is—in his way." Cole got to his feet. "Well, Miss Esther, I'm shore obliged to you for a mighty fine meal. I'll remember it."

The girl also arose, and as he was about to turn away she came swiftly forward and laid a light hand on his arm. He turned and looked down at her. The violet eyes were very wide.

"Mr. Baynard, I—I want to tell you something. The sheriff—Mort Cain—you must watch him. He's vindictive, and he hates you. I could see it in his face. Watch him—every minute!"

Cole smiled at her, but his eyes were cold. "I will," he promised. "I'm sorta used to takin' care of myself, but thanks just the same."

He turned and went outside. So the sheriff was a vindictive man and hated him. Well, the former he had judged for himself, and the latter did not seem at all unlikely.

The man he had been cautioned to watch was standing outside a saloon on the far side of the street. Cole paused long enough to roll a cigarette, eyeing the sheriff beneath his hat brim. Mort Cain was glowering at him, lower lip sagging a bit more than usual.

Cole carefully sealed the cigarette—lit it. Then he walked directly across the street, passed the surly officer with a curt nod, and stepped inside the saloon. He was not the man to force a quarrel, but he certainly would not sidestep one. If the sheriff intended getting ugly, better to have the thing out then and there.

Dusk was approaching, and the hanging lamps had been lighted. A few loungers occupied the chairs

ranged along the outside walls, but the gaming tables had not as yet been uncovered.

Baynard walked up to the bar and ordered a bottle of beer. He did not really want the drink, but its consumption would afford an excuse to remain where the sheriff could find him. He stood there, alternately puffing at the cigarette and sipping the beverage, eyes on the back-bar mirror. Presently he heard the swish of the swinging doors and the thud of boot-heels. A bit later he caught the reflection of the officer in the mirror. He turned casually as the sheriff tapped him on the shoulder.

"I reckon I'll haf to ask you for that gun yo're totin'," said Cain.

"All right; go ahead."

"Go ahead, what?"

"Ask me."

Cain's sagging lip trembled slightly. "That's what I'm doin'."

Cole turned all the way around and, hooking one heel on the brass rail, let his eyes rove over the men along the wall of the saloon. He saw that some of them were changing positions, leaving the chairs that would be in the line of fire to find seats elsewhere. There was an air of expectancy hanging over the place like an electrically charged rain cloud. Cole noticed that every man in the place was armed.

"If yo're collectin' hardware," he suggested mildly, "mebbe it would be a good plan to start at the door and sorta work up to me."

The sheriff made an impatient gesture. "I know these fellas. Yo're a stranger. What's more, you were seen to come out o' Rustler Pass right after Bill Kehoe's men rode in."

"You meanin' anything by that?" asked Cole gently.

"You can take it any way you want to. I'm askin' for yore gun."

Cole looked down at the cigarette stub between his fingers. His eyes were on the glowing tip, but he could see the solidly braced legs of Mort Cain and the big right fist that hung, clawlike, near the butt of his gun. The request for his weapon, Cole felt sure, was but Cain's clumsy way of picking a fight; and as a sequel to the quarrel, Cole felt equally sure, the man who called himself sheriff expected to have him carried from the room—feet first.

Outwardly undisturbed, inwardly alert and as tense as a coiled steel spring, Cole glanced about him as though seeking a place to toss the cigarette butt. He was in a tight place, and he knew it. He might get Cain, but the instant the officer dropped, Cole knew that a dozen slugs would rip through his body. Wisdom whispered to surrender the gun and evade the issue; but experience told him that such action would but postpone the crisis.

Across the room was a big cast-iron stove. Cole walked leisurely to it, reached for the door, opened it and flipped the cigarette stub inside. From the corners of his eyes, he was watching the face of the man nearest him. The fellow was intent, not on his movements, but on Mort Cain behind him. He saw the watcher tense suddenly, and knew that the moment had come. Like a flash of light he wheeled.

Cain, his face a mask of grim purpose, had drawn his Colt—was bringing it into line. He had been about to shoot Baynard in the back!

Cole leaped like a cat to his right as the weapon roared, reaching for his own six-gun as he did so. He felt the tug of Cain's bullet as it tore through the left side of his coat. Then he fired—once. . . .

Even as the sheriff staggered backwards at the impact of the slug on his chest, Baynard dodged behind the stove. He was not an instant too soon. A volley of revolver shots echoed in the close confines of the saloon, and slugs thudded and whined against the stove. Behind it crouched Cole, six-gun ready.

Powder smoke eddied upward, obscuring the light of the lamps. A bullet dug into the floor at his feet, another twitched at an exposed shoulder.

"Hold it, everybody!" came a sudden command, and the firing ceased abruptly. Cole ventured a quick glance around the protecting side of the stove. The tall deputy who had been called "Slim" stood in the doorway, his gun covering the crowd of men in front of him.

"What's goin' on here?" demanded the deputy.

One of the crowd spoke: "That pilgrim that jest rode in rubbed out Mort Cain when Mort tried to take his gun."

"Did, huh? Well, I'll take charge o' him."

"I reckon we can do that ourselves," replied the man.

"No, I don't reckon you can," said Slim coldly. "Mebbe yo're forgettin', Ham, that I'm Mort's chief deputy. I reckon I'm a sorta temporary sheriff now that he's out o' the runnin'. I said I'll take charge o' Baynard. Put up yore guns, all of you."

There was a moment of hesitation during which furtive glances were exchanged; then, seeing that the slim deputy would not back down an inch, the one called Ham shoved his weapon into its holster with a savage oath.

"Aw, if you feel so dam' lucky, take charge."

Slim stepped to the front of the crowd, assured himself that they had all obeyed his order, then dropped his own gun into its scabbard.

"You can come out now, Baynard," he said calmly.

Back of the stove, Cole Baynard stood erect and grimly eyed the man called Slim. He had not intended to surrender, preferring to take his chances shooting his way out of trouble; but in the determined face of the other he read a promise of a square deal, and Cole knew men.

He stepped out from behind the stove and handed his gun to the deputy. Slim slipped it in the waistband of his trousers and, jerking his head toward the door, indicated that Cole should precede him. Once outside the saloon, Slim fell in beside him.

"Now you can tell me about it if you want to," he suggested.

Cole did so. When he had finished, Slim shook his head thoughtfully.

"Mort was out to get you," he said. "Told me so hisself. Jest the same, I'll haf to lock you up. But I'll hightail it right over to Perry's and tell Sut the story. Personal, I believe you. Mort was my boss in a way, but he was a bully, a boaster, and a gunslinger to boot. Mebbe if I git yore side o' the story to Sut first, he'll see reason."

He led the way to the courthouse, along a corridor, and into a room at the rear which was fitted with jail cells. In one of these he locked Cole. Then he turned and grinned at his prisoner.

"I don't know whether I can do you any good or not," he said. "But I'm shore gonna bust a rib tryin'. Anybody that can let Mort Cain git his gun out and leveled, and then knock him over, is shore deservin' o' my best efforts."

He waved a genial farewell and strode through the doorway. Baynard, watching him through the bars, decided that here was a man that would do to take along.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Lew Gore Talks*

SUTTON PERRY was in his office pondering the problem that had so suddenly forced itself upon him. He felt now that he had made a mistake in denying knowledge of the elder Baynard. He realized that it would have been far better had he openly admitted acquaintanceship and had disclosed to Cole Baynard the manner of Sam's death. Had he done so, he felt that he would have se-

cured the young man's gratitude for the effort he had apparently made to save his father. As it now stood, if the son ever learned of Perry's connection with his parent his suspicions would surely be aroused.

Perry grinned mirthlessly. After all, he was worrying about nothing. Mort Cain, naturally dense as he was, had understood his instructions quite well. Young Baynard would meet with an accident. Probably he would be shot down while resisting arrest.

Perry turned quickly at the sound of a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Slim, Mr. Perry. Got some news for you."

Perry smiled again. The "news" probably concerned young Baynard. He had heard shots a short while before, but had thought nothing of them at the time. The members of the rough crew he employed were constantly fighting among themselves.

"Come in!" he called. Then as the deputy entered: "Sit down, Slim. Here, have a cigar. So you have news, eh?"

Slim selected one of the perfectos from the box tendered him by Perry and calmly proceeded to bite off the end and light it.

"Yeah," he said callously. "Somebody got killed."

"No! That's too bad. Another fool get careless with his gun?"

"Uh-huh," replied Slim, letting the smoke trickle from his mouth. "I knowed he'd git it sooner or later."

Perry leaned forward a bit eagerly. "Who—was it?"

The deputy eyed him sleepily. "Cain," he said.

"Cain!" Sutton Perry sprang to his feet. "You say Cain got shot! Who shot him?"

"Young Baynard," answered the deputy calmly. "From what I could gather, Mort asked the lad for his gun and when he refused to give it up right away, cut down on him when his back was turned. Baynard ducked Mort's first slug." He glanced reflectively at the cigar end. "Mort didn't fire a second one."

"He killed Mort!" Perry's eyes were round with wonder. "And after Cain had drawn! Man, it can't be true."

"Mebbe not," drawled Slim, "but you can view the remains over to the undertaker's, and Baynard is in the calaboose if you want to question him."

"Question him?" Perry's eyes had gone narrow and calculating. Again fate had stacked the deck for him. "Of course I'll question him, and I'll try him at the same time. And then, after he is convicted, I'll have you hang him. A stranger can't come into Perryville and shoot the sheriff just because that officer asks him to hand over his gun."

Slim spoke slowly. "No-o-o, not if it happens thataway. But it didn't. Mort had a grudge against the boy. There was no call to ask for Baynard's gun. He knowed the lad would refuse to give it up. I'm figgerin' he *wanted* him to refuse."

"You're figuring too closely to suit me," said Perry.

There was cold steel in the voice, and Slim knew that he had gone a bit too far.

"O' course, that's jest a guess," he qualified. "Sut, I kinda hate to see the young fella do a atmosphere dance for simply defendin' hisself. Mort was a bully and not too smart in the haid. He'd 'a' nabbed Bill Kehoe long ago if he had any sense a-tall. Why, this young Baynard could run rings around Mort when it come to catchin' that slippery rustler. He can sling a gun faster than Mort ever dreamed about, and he's got brains to boot."

Perry was staring at the deputy, a new-born scheme taking shape in his fertile mind. Slim puffed leisurely at his cigar, then leaned over to flick the ash in a wastepaper basket. He had planted the seed; he must give it time to germinate. When he looked

up he saw that Sutton Perry had walked over to the window and was gazing out into the darkness.

Presently Perry turned and came back to the desk. Slim's suggestion had borne fruit, but hardly the kind of fruit that the deputy imagined. For to Perry had come with the suddenness of a bolt out of the blue a way out of his difficulties—a scheme whereby one menace would surely be removed from his path, and possibly two. He would pit Cole Baynard against Bill Kehoe!

In the lamplight Perry's face was tranquil again; he almost smiled. He sank down into his chair and gazed steadily at the waiting deputy.

"After hearing your argument in favor of the prisoner," he said suavely, "I am about persuaded to be lenient, Slim. In fact, it has occurred to me that I may be able to use Baynard in a good cause instead of abruptly removing him from society. As you say, Mort Cain was undoubtedly stupid. I never realized until tonight just how stupid he was. His death is regrettable, but probably justified. Do you know where you can lay hands on Lew Gore?"

"He was in the Oasis when Mort got his'n," answered the deputy.

"Good. Find him and send him over at once. Then, a half-hour later, bring Baynard in to see me. You understand. A half-hour."

"I getcha. I'm glad you see a way out for Baynard, chief. I'll send Lew right over."

Slim tucked the cigar in a corner of his mouth, slapped on his Stetson, and strode from the room. Harly five minutes passed before Lew Gore, furtive and shifty-eyed, slipped into the room, battered hat in hand. The wheels of fate, expertly manipulated by Sutton Perry, were rolling smoothly and easily by the time the half-hour had expired.

"You understand now, do you?" asked Perry.

"Shore do," replied Lew Gore. "I lived up in Nevady when old Sam Baynard was prospectin' there. He was a little man, not more'n five-foot-seven, with a big mustache and gray eyes. Had a little scar on his forehead where a chip o' rock hit him. Yeah, I remember him right well—considerin' that I never met him."

"Fine," said Perry, highly pleased. "That will do very nicely." He turned to scan some writing on a scrap of paper. "By the way, Lew, if I remember correctly, you were one of the crew that drove that last bunch of stock to the railroad. Am I right?"

"Yeah. Me and Shorty Wells and Skip Morgan."

"Well, it might interest you to know that I thought the drive very well conducted. The cattle were received in good condition and brought a fancy price." He withdrew from a tin box in the desk a little stack of gold coins. "I'm paying you boys a bonus of one hundred dollars. I always reward ability in my men."

"Thankee, Mr. Perry," said Lew Gore, seizing the coins and shoving them in his chaps pocket. Perry knew from the greed mirrored in the man's eyes that Wells and Morgan would never share the "reward," which was, of course, as Perry had intended it.

He started as he heard a rap on the front door. Quickly he motioned Gore through the entrance to the dining room.

"Stay there till I call you," he whispered.

When Slim entered with his prisoner, Sutton Perry was again seated at his desk. He looked up at them.

"Hello, Baynard. Come over and sit down." His voice was grave and a bit cold, but not hostile. Cole Baynard dropped easily into the chair indicated. Slim pulled up another one and straddled it.

"Now tell me just what happened," said Perry. "As it stands, you are guilty of killing the sheriff of Perry County. Whether or not the shooting was justified depends entirely upon

your story and the backing it receives. I hold a judgeship in this community, and we'll call this an informal preliminary trial. If I deem the shooting justified, I think I can promise you your freedom. If not, I must bind you over to our regular court. Proceed."

Cole was inwardly grinning at this travesty on justice, but he did not doubt that Perry took it all very seriously. Certainly if the man desired to hold him accountable, there was no real law to which he could appeal. So he told his story frankly, tersely; and Slim corroborated his statements as much as it was possible for him to do so.

When he had finished, Sutton Perry sat looking down at the desk pad before him. Then he raised his eyes to stare levelly into those of Baynard.

"Mr. Baynard," he said impressively, "I can find nothing in your actions at which Sheriff Cain might have taken offense; certainly nothing that would justify his attempt to shoot you in the back. In your killing of him I can find only praise for you, praise that you should beat so skilled a gunman at his own game. I think that I can promise you that the thing will never come to trial, provided you, on your part, will do a little service to the community in exchange for your freedom."

Cole smiled faintly. He had imagined that there would be a string attached to it somewhere.

"Slim," said Perry evenly, "will you leave us alone? I want to talk with Baynard."

"Shore will," drawled Slim. He offered his hand to Cole. "Glad you made it, Baynard. I'll be seein' you. S'long, Mr. Perry."

"Just a minute. Where is Mr. Baynard's gun?"

"Right here."

Slim withdrew the weapon from his waistband and handed it to Cole. Then with a final wave of farewell, he stalked through the doorway.

Perry motioned toward the box of perfectos. "Have a cigar, Baynard."

"Thanks. I reckon I'll roll me a quirly. Now, what's on yore mind, Mr. Perry?"

"Something that is going to interest you mightily. I'll get down to the details at once. Baynard, you've killed one of my men. I have considered the circumstances, and I find the killing justified. That ends it. But the fact remains that you have removed from my service a valuable officer, a man to whom I had entrusted the capture or extermination of Bill Kehoe and his gang. Cain's death leaves me at loose ends. I don't know what he had planned, or what he had learned of Kehoe's movements. Under the circumstances I think it only just that you should replace the man you removed."

"In other words," said Cole slowly, "you want me to take over this manhunt in Cain's place?"

"Yes. Cain was willing, but stupid. You are his master with a gun, and you have something he never did possess—brains. I'm prepared to appoint you his successor in office and arm you with all his powers. You shall have the men and the equipment necessary to exterminate this rustler gang, and your pay will be one hundred and fifty dollars a month."

"That is, if I decide to take the job."

"I think I can persuade you to take it."

"I think yo're wrong, Mr. Perry. It just happens that I have a hunt of my own on my hands. I'm not a professional gunman, and I never craved to be a sheriff. Yo've saved me from a nasty time provin' myself justified in shootin' Mort Cain. I'll not forget it, even though I was only defendin' my life. But I can't take the job you offer me."

The two men sat looking across the desk corner at each other. Both were smiling, but their eyes were hard.

"I still think I can persuade you to take it," said Perry smoothly. "You see, I've been looking into that matter of the disappearance of your father. I inquired among my men if any of them had ever met a prospector named Baynard. I found one who had known him."

Cole's face went tense, and he leaned forward in his chair.

"You—found—somebody!" He nearly choked on the words.

Perry smiled quietly and got to his feet. Walking over to the dining room door he opened it and said, "All right, come in, Gore."

Cole saw a keen-eyed, cleaver-faced cowpuncher slouch through the doorway and stand hesitatingly just across the threshold.

"This is Lew Gore, Baynard," said Perry. "He knew a prospector named Baynard."

Cole's eyes were boring into those of the man before him. The fellow returned his gaze with an unblinking stare.

"This man you knew," began Cole, "what was his first name?"

"Name was Sam Baynard," replied the other promptly. "I knowed him right well. Used to buy supplies at a little store in Quigley, Nevady. Was workin' the hills near there, but I never knowed jest where. He was a little man, not over five-foot-seven if he was that. Had gray eyes and a big mustache, and if I remember right they was a scar on his forehead where a chip o' rock hit him onct."

Cole Baynard's every muscle was as taut as a steel cable.

"How long ago was this?"

"Musta been—lemme see—ten or twelve years ago. Yeah, it was jest about ten years ago."

"Do you know where he is now?"

The young man was leaning far out of his chair, eyes eager and expectant.

Gore shifted his weight to his other foot, and his eyes sought those of Sutton Perry.

"Tell him," advised Perry quietly. "He's a grown man."

Gore turned his gaze on Baynard. "He's daid," he said solemnly.

Cole drew his breath softly through set teeth. Very slowly he relaxed his tense muscles, pushed himself back in the chair.

"Tell me about it," he said in a flat voice.

"Well, I was a-settin' in the store one evenin' when Sam come in to buy some stuff. He paid for it outa a poke o' dust. We all knowed Sam was lookin' for gold, but none of us figgered he'd found it. One jasper was sittin' back o' the stove. He seen the poke, jest like I did. He got up and follered Sam out, but he said he was sleepy and was goin' home, and I didn't pay him no attention. The next day Sam was found—murdered. The man that did it skipped out."

"You know the man—that did it?" Cole heard himself asking.

"Yeah, I knowed him."

Baynard gripped the chair with both hands, and again he leaned forward to catch the answer to his next question.

"Who was it?"

The man looked steadily into his eyes. "Bill Kehoe," he said.

For several minutes Cole Baynard sat there staring ahead of him. His long quest was over; there remained only the matter of payment. For the time he was lost in contemplation of the opportunity he had unknowingly missed. Bill Kehoe had killed his father, and Bill Kehoe had that very day been within six feet of him. He knew that he could have shot Kehoe when the rustler chief had turned to scan the valley below. That he himself would have died a moment later did not enter his thoughts.

Sutton Perry, watching calculatingly, nodded slowly to Lew Gore. The man slipped quietly out to the hall. A moment later Perry heard the front door slam.

"Well?" he asked gently.

Cole Baynard rose slowly to his feet. His face was expressionless now, but the gray eyes were like bits of hard, scintillating ice.

"Yo've hired yoreself a sheriff," he said shortly.

And this time Perry did smile.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Letter*

SLIM HENDRICKS strode into the courthouse office and tossed his hat on a chair.

"Howdy, Sheriff," he said, and grinned.

Cole Baynard answered quietly. "Hello, Slim. You can leave off the 'sheriff' when you talk to me."

Slim dropped into a chair, tilted it back against the wall, and gazed at his chief with quizzical eyes. "It's a danged nice title," he observed. "I wouldn't mind ownin' it myself."

"It don't mean a thing, and you know it," said Cole shortly. "This county ain't even on the map. I'm not a sheriff; I'm Sut Perry's head gunman."

"Yo'd better not tell Sut that," cautioned the deputy. "He takes it goshawful serious. Anyhow, if you feel that way about it, how come you took the job?" He went on quickly as Baynard's cold eyes were fastened upon him: "Oh, I know that you felt it was kinda up to you when Sut let you off, but you ain't the man to do somethin' you don't want to do. I know that, Cole."

"I didn't take the job to please Perry," said Cole shortly. "I took it because Bill Kehoe murdered my daddy."

"Oh-h-h!"

Slim was staring back at him now, and Cole watched the deputy's expression of surprise give way to one of sympathy.

"Shucks," said Slim. "I'm shore enough sorry to hear that, Cole. So Kehoe killed yore dad, huh? When did it happen, son?"

"Ten years ago," answered Cole. The subject was distasteful to him, but of all the men he had met in this town of Perryville, Slim was the only one that he felt he could trust. And the time might come when he would need somebody's aid, and need it badly. He liked to think that if a crisis arose he could depend on this tall, lean deputy sheriff who had proven his nerve in the Oasis Saloon.

Cole explained quietly: "Dad left mother and me on our ranch in Texas about twelve years ago. I was only a kid then. We expected to hear from him sooner or later, but he never wrote us. Ma thinks about him all the time. I reckon it's the uncertainty that worries her. If she knew for shore that he was dead, she could kinda get used to it. I made up my mind at last to find out what become of him. Well, I did. After Perry sent you outa the room last night he called in Lew Gore. Gore said my daddy had been killed by Bill Kehoe in a town called Quigley, Nevada."

Slim's eyes went narrow. "Lew Gore told you that, huh? Well, you can divide by five and subtract a couple million if you want the right answer. I know that jigger from 'way back. He's a no-account puncher on Sut's ranch, and a straight descendent o' Adam's original snake."

"I figgered him somethin' of the sort," answered Cole. "But he must of knowed my daddy, for he described him to me. However, I'm not takin' his word for it." He waved his hand toward a letter that he had just finished. "I'm writin' to the town marshal of Quigley, Nevada, askin' for details."

Slim nodded his approval. "It's a good idee, Cole. I'd git that letter off on the mornin' stage. Let me have it; I'll take it over to Harper and give it to him."

"Thanks, Slim, but I'm goin' over myself in a minute. Right now I want you to round up twenty good men and tell 'em to stick around where we

can get them in a hurry. Kehoe's comin' back, and there's no tellin' when he'll come."

"Shore." The lanky deputy got up and reached for his hat. "But you git that letter off pronto, son. S'long."

Cole watched him stride through the doorway; then, letter in hand, he went outside and crossed the street to Harper's store. Here he purchased a stamp, stuck it on the envelope, and handed the letter to Harper himself with instructions to get it out that morning.

Back on the sidewalk, he started for the Perry home. He had given much thought to the trapping of the elusive Bill Kehoe, and the more he pondered the matter the more he became convinced that the rustler chief would never be caught by mere force of arms. Bill, he felt sure, directed his forays from the cluster of rock at the mouth of Rustler Pass. They might succeed in rounding up some of the gang, but it was Kehoe that he wanted and Kehoe that he meant to get. A vague plan was shaping in the back of his head, and he wanted to talk to Perry about it, because, in order to carry it out, he might need Perry's aid.

A horse was standing at the hitching-rack outside the house, and Cole saw that it wore the monogram brand of Sutton Perry. Probably somebody who had ridden in to see Sut on business connected with the ranch, thought Cole.

He walked across the broad veranda and stopped at the open door. Voices reached him from the parlor to the left of the hallway—the gruff voice of a man and the strained one of the girl, Esther.

"Yo're ridin' with me," the man was saying doggedly. "Sut said so, and I reckon you know that means yo're goin'."

"But I don't want to, Mr. Tygert. I—I have too much work to do."

"That can wait," came the impatient answer. The voice took on a wheedling note. "Aw, come on, Esther. You hang around this shanty too much for yore own good. Yo're gittin' as thin and pinched as a Montanny shorthorn after a hard winter. You need fresh air. Come on."

"I can't," replied the girl firmly. "I don't see why you bother me, Ham Tygert. You know I don't want to go out with you."

Cole, reluctant to play eavesdropper, had started to move quietly away from the door when the nickname reached him. He stopped abruptly. Esther had called the man "Ham." It came to Cole that this must be the man who had been so set on avenging the death of Mort Cain. Cole remembered the repulsive, stubble-covered face with its thick lips and beady eyes. He abruptly turned and walked into the hall.

"Good mornin', Miss Esther," he said politely, and stepped into the room.

The two were standing in the middle of the room. Ham Tygert wheeled swiftly, his evil face twisted into a scowl of annoyance.

"What the hell do you want?" he growled.

Cole was smiling into the relieved eyes of the girl. Tygert he completely ignored.

"I was wonderin' if yo'd forgotten that you was goin' ridin' with me this mornin'," he said gently.

"Why—why, no, I hadn't," stammered the girl. "I—Mr. Tygert dropped in for a moment and detained me. Do you know each other? Sheriff Baynard, this is my uncle's foreman, Mr. Tygert."

"Yeah, I know him," said Tygert grimly. "And I aim to know him a heap better before I git through with him."

Cole had not once glanced toward the man. Now he spoke again to Esther:

"I reckon Mr. Tygert will excuse us, ma'am. I'll wait till you get on yore ridin' things."

"Of course."

The girl hesitated. If she left the room, Ham Tygert might seize the opportunity to pick a fight with this new sheriff, and while Cole had assured her that he was in the habit of taking care of himself, Ham had killed more than one man in a gun brawl. If she remained she might in some way be able to avert the crisis. She was spared a decision by a voice at the doorway.

"You gentlemen aren't quarreling, I hope?"

Ham Tygert looked up quickly. Cole did not turn, but, sidestepping quickly, placed his back to the wall of the room where he could see the doorway and Tygert at the same time.

"No, we ain't quarrelin'," sneered Ham. "Not a-tall, we ain't! I jest come to take Esther ridin', and this jasper horns in on the party. Said she promised to ride with him."

Sutton Perry eyed him levelly. "That should settle the argument I should think. If the lady had a previous engagement, it looks to me as though that lets you out, Hamilton."

"Yeah? Well, look again. You said I could take her ridin', and I'm holdin' you to yore word, Sut."

Perry's lips still smiled and his voice was as gentle as a summer zephyr, but his eyes were glinting with a hard, cold light.

"I'm sorry, Hamilton, but of course I had no knowledge of Esther's previous engagement. If she promised to ride with Sheriff Baynard, I shouldn't think of asking her to break her word. *Do I make myself clear?*"

The foreman stood there glaring uncertainly for a full minute, but the warning he read in Perry's eyes could not be misunderstood.

"Aw, hell!" he growled savagely; and jamming his hat on his head, he stamped angrily from the room.

"An unfortunate occurrence," said Perry smoothly. "Tygert is a bit hotheaded. I hope you'll overlook his actions, Baynard."

"I've already overlooked 'em considerable," drawled Cole.

"Thanks. I hope you two have a pleasant ride." Perry nodded genially and turned from the room.

For a moment the girl and the new sheriff looked into each other's eyes.

"I just remembered what I came for," said Cole soberly, although there was the hint of a twinkle in his eye. "It was to tell you that business prevents my takin' you ridin' like I'd promised to—when was it, anyhow?"

The girl laughed, a bit shakily. "It must have been last evening. It was the only time you had a chance to ask me. . . . Thank you, Mr. Baynard. I—that man gives me the creeps. You really did me a great favor. I only hope he lets the matter rest there."

Cole shrugged indifferently. "That's up to him. Me, I'm not interested in fightin' anybody right now but Bill Kehoe."

The girl reached out and laid one hand gently on his arm. "Uncle Sutton told me—about Kehoe and your father. I'm awfully sorry."

"Thank you, ma'am. I'll be goin' now. Mebbe yo'd better keep out of sight while Tygert's around."

He nodded to her and walked from the room. He saw that Perry had stopped outside the door to his office on the far side of the hall and was looking toward a man who had just entered the house. The man was the storekeeper, Harper.

"You want to see me?" asked Perry.

Harper stopped abruptly. He had seen Cole come into the hall.

"Why—yes," he answered hesitatingly. "Unless yo're gonna be busy with the sheriff. It's about—that shipment, Mr. Perry."

Perry turned to Cole. "How about it, Baynard?"

"I can wait," said Cole, and walked past them to the street.

Tygert's horse was still at the hitching-rack, but the foreman was not in

sight. Cole walked over to the courthouse. A little more mature thought would whip his plan into better shape for presentation to Sutton Perry. As for the girl, he had helped her out of a distasteful situation. She would be on her guard now and should be able to keep out of Ham Tygert's way.

Cole realized that he had made another enemy, but that did not worry him unduly. He was wholly engaged with ways and means of reaching Bill Kehoe; until that matter was settled, nothing else seemed of importance.

He had barely reached his office when Tygert came out of a saloon across the street from the Perry mansion. He strode purposefully into the house, glanced into the now empty parlor, and with a savage oath slouched over to the door of Perry's office just as it opened to let Harper into the hall. The storekeeper nodded and hurried toward the front entrance. Tygert stepped into Sutton Perry's office and closed the door behind him.

Perry looked up from the letter which was spread before him, hastily dropping a hand on the paper to conceal it as much as was possible.

"Hamilton," he said coldly, "if you don't get over the habit of bouncing in on me without announcing yourself, I'll have to put a patent lock on that door or a bell around your neck."

"Don't try to be funny, Sut," said the foreman harshly. "I got a bone to pick with you, and don't you forgit it." His voice shook with repressed fury. "What in hell do you mean by lettin' that Baynard jigger horn in on me? You told me I could have the girl, then, by Gawd! you back his play."

"I think you're forgetting yourself," said Perry sharply. Two red spots of anger blazed in his sallow cheeks. "I told you you could marry the girl, and that still goes. But you damned clumsy mis-begotten fool, it's you that's horning into my game! Don't get the idea that you can dictate to me!"

"I ain't tryin' to," said Tygert sullenly. That sudden flare of wrath on the part of Sutton Perry was a bit unexpected. "And don't forgit that I know a few things about you that wouldn't look good in print."

"It's not my habit to forget anything," said Perry in a more natural voice. "I remember that you're the one man in this section of the country that knows anything about my past life. I brought you here with me because you understand cattle and I don't. But you mustn't get the idea that your services are indispensable. They certainly are not. You walk the line I lay for you, or I'll fix your clock, Tygert. I'm playing a game with this Baynard fellow, and it's like fooling with dynamite. If you weren't such a damned lunkhead you would have realized before this that Cole Baynard is the son of the man who left me the Golden Lily mine. I've no intention of splitting my profits with him as I might have to if he tries to break that will."

Ham Tygert was staring. "Baynard's son, huh? But I thought that was a genuwine will!"

"It is," answered Perry shortly. He was sorry now that in his anger he had mentioned the will. "It's just as genuine as it can be; but you must remember that there were no witnesses. If young Baynard should contest it, the whole matter would be dug up again, and if it was discovered that Sam Baynard wrote letters which never reached his family, the fact that I was postmaster at the time might cause me some—ah—embarrassment." He hurried on: "But that isn't the point. I want you to keep hands off because I've got him all primed to go out and get Bill Kehoe."

"Hell, Sut! Why didn't you tell me before? How'd he find out that Bill salivated his old man?" Tygert, as had several others, had heard of Perry's plan to pit Baynard against Kehoe.

Briefly, Perry explained. "I got Lew Gore to say he knew the old man in

Quigley, Nevada, and was there when Bill shot him."

Tygert chuckled. "Quigley, Nevady, huh? That was smart o' you, Sut."

Perry raised the hand which covered the paper before him.

"It wasn't bad; but remember that Baynard is no nitwit himself. Harper just brought me a letter Baynard left with him to send out on the stage. It is addressed to the marshal of Quigley, Nevada, and it asks for facts about the murder of Samuel Baynard ten years ago."

"Say-y-y, it's a good thing you got yore hands on that letter, Sut. If Harper hadn't caught it, first thing you know this Baynard would be gettin' a reply sayin' as how Sam Baynard never lived at Quigley, Nevady, and that Lew Gore was unknown, too. Yes, it's a danged lucky thing you got that letter."

Sutton Perry waved a contemptuous hand. "The letter itself would have done no harm. It serves us, however, by warning us that Baynard is suspicious. We've got to watch him."

Ham Tygert leaned forward eagerly. "Say, Sut, jest you give me the word and I'll take that jigger to pieces and see what makes him tick."

"Not yet. Bill Kehoe is out to steal me blind. He feels that in some way I cheated him of the Golden Lily. I'm using Baynard to get Kehoe. You keep away from him while he's on the job."

Perry picked up letter and envelope and tore them across, once—twice—again. Then he dropped the pieces into his waste-paper basket.

Ham grinned at him wolfishly. "Looks like you got the habit o' tamperin' with the mail," he said.

"Perryville is not a post office," answered Sut calmly. "Letters do not become mail until they are turned over to the postmaster at the end of the stage line. And that particular letter would never be delivered anyway." He smiled faintly. "There is no town named Quigley in Nevada."

Ham eyed him in reluctant admiration. "Sut, I said you was smart. But how about me and this jigger Baynard? You figger I'm gonna set around with my finger in my mouth while he makes up to Esther?"

"I figure that is just what you are going to do," answered Perry calmly.

"But dammit! Suppose she falls for him? Suppose they git stuck on each other?"

Perry smiled a tight smile. "What does it matter? She can't marry a dead man."

"A dead man! Then you mean—?"

Perry's smile vanished. "What do you think I mean? Haven't you sense enough to see that I can't permit this fellow to wander about the country until he stumbles on the truth?" He stared hard into the eager eyes of his foreman. "Ham, I'm making you a promise. Just as soon as Cole Baynard kills Bill Kehoe, *you can kill Cole Baynard!*"

There was a short silence. Ham was breathing jerkily, and his eyes were thin slits of hate.

"I getcha," he said hoarsely. "I getcha, Sut. And here's hopin' he nails Bill right quick."

Outside the house there was a flurry of flying hoofs. A sweated, dust covered pony pulled up on his haunches, and a grimy, cleaver-faced puncher dropped to the ground. He started at a run for the veranda, but stopped as Perry and Tygert appeared at the front door.

"They's hell to pay, boss!" cried Lew Gore. "Bill Kehoe's struck again! Killed two nightherders and is headin' toward Rustler Pass with a hundred and fifty haid. Now bring on yore new sheriff!"

## CHAPTER VI

### *Baynard's Plan*

TEN minutes after the arrival of Lew Gore with news of the raid, Cole Baynard was sweeping out of Perryville with Slim Hendricks at his

side and twenty well-armed men behind him.

They rode hard, for it would take hard riding to catch up with the well-mounted rustlers. The plan that Kehoe invariably followed was to place his men under cover of darkness, then, with the coming of dawn, to make his raid and haze the stolen cattle toward Rustler Pass. By the time a rider could get to town and start a posse in pursuit, the raiders would be halfway to the pass. After that their well-organized defense was sufficient to hold the sheriff's men at bay until the security of the gap was reached.

Cole realized this as they headed across the range, and he realized at the same time that as long as the game was played along these lines his chance of cornering Bill Kehoe was as remote as the stars.

Cole studied the situation as he rode. Ahead of them, just a faint line on the horizon, was a ribbon of dust that marked the flying herd. Still ahead, but somewhat to his left was the narrow cleft in the hills that he knew to be Rustler Pass. If the posse kept its present course, it would, as usual, bring up in the rear of the stolen herd, to be held at bay by the Winchesters of the strong protecting party.

He reached out and touched Slim on the arm. "Take ten men and follow the herd," he yelled above the thunder of hoofs. "I'll take the rest and try to head 'em off at the pass."

Slim's eyes went wide, and he nodded his understanding. Cole allowed his horse to drop back, and picking out his men, signaled for them to follow him. He angled off to the left, heading directly for the pass.

The cattle came into sight at last, a dark mass of bobbing heads and clashing horns. Startled swing men were lashing them to a fast run; the riders in the drag were not even attempting to keep the laggards going. Back of the herd the Winchester-armed rear guard was engaged in holding Slim's party at a safe distance. It appeared to Cole that his own party would reach the rocky gap if not ahead of the herd at least ahead of the men who were protecting it.

Then his eye caught a little glint of light from the entrance to the pass. Just a flicker and it was gone. Presently he saw it again, and its significance struck him at once. Bill Kehoe, stationed high in the rocks, was flashing a message to his men with a mirror.

That the message had been received and interpreted became apparent a minute later. Half the armed guards swung away from their partners and started after the herd with the evident intention of heading off Cole's party.

Baynard swiftly estimated the distance to the pass. He saw at once that Kehoe's men would reach its safety first. From behind the rocks they could fire deliberately at his riders, and the men who were now holding off Slim's party could take them in the rear. Cole saw this at a glance, but he also saw that Kehoe's division of his covering force offered an advantage that Cole was quick to seize.

Abruptly he swerved his horse to the right, and his men, urging their mounts to the limit in an effort to reach the pass, eyed him in consternation. Then they caught the idea, and with yells of delight surged after him. Like a huge flying wedge they cut between the riflemen making for the pass and those facing Slim's party. Before the latter knew it, they were shut off from the gap and placed between two fires.

There was but one thing to do, and they did it. In an alarmed, compact body they sought to outride Cole's men—tried to work from between the two posses; and the course they were obliged to take was straight back the way they had come, away from Rustler Pass.

Grimly the net tightened about them. They fought back savagely but futilely. Slim's men harried them on

one flank, Cole's on the other. Saddles were being emptied, horses shot down. A man threw away his rifle, pulled his mount to a halt, and elevated both hands. Others followed his example. The chase ended abruptly. Four of Kehoe's men were down; the six survivors surrendered.

Cole sat his horse listlessly while Slim attended to the disarming and binding of the prisoners and the preparation for packing out the dead and wounded. His eyes strayed back to the narrow pass and the man who was hidden there. The fact that Bill Kehoe must be raving like a maniac brought him little consolation. For a moment it had looked as though he was about to break through to the man who had murdered his father, but that sudden division of forces had prevented it. Even in defeat Bill Kehoe had been victorious in that he had escaped the vengeance which should have overtaken him.

"Well, you shore turned the trick, old son," said Slim, his homely face covered with a grin of delight. "You shore chucked a monkey-wrench in Kehoe's machinery." He snapped his fingers. "Jest like that and you wipe out half o' his gang."

"And let him escape," added Cole moodily.

Slim nodded. "Shore, I know the job ain't complete yet; but I'm tellin' a man yo've made a fine beginnin'."

Slowly they rode back to town. Their horses were winded from the long hard run, and the animals bearing the dead and injured had to be led. They were met at the end of the street by a band of excited citizens, Sutton Perry and Ham Tygert in the lead. Perry's eyes were glinting with savage anticipation.

"Did you get Kehoe?" he asked eagerly, and Ham Tygert dropped a hopeful hand to the butt of his Colt.

"No," answered Cole. "He's hidin' in the pass like I told you. But we got ten of his men—six of them still sittin' their saddles."

"They won't sit 'em long," snapped Perry. "Herd them down to the corral back of the livery stable. There's a good long beam over the gate. We'll hang 'em right there."

"The prisoners," said Cole firmly, "are goin' to jail to await trial. You might as well understand that now as later, Mr. Perry."

"You're crazy," said Perry shortly. "They're guilty, and every man of us knows it. A trial would be an unnecessary waste of time. As far as that is concerned, I'm judge around here, and I'm pronouncing them guilty right now."

"Yo're dam' right they're guilty!" declared Ham Tygert.

"They're goin' to jail just the same," repeated Baynard. "As I understand it, I'm representin' the law. Either I'm a shore-enough sheriff or just a gun-dummy. Which is it, Perry?"

Sutton Perry scowled. The issue had been put squarely up to him. If he persisted in his present course, he would be flaunting the very law he had created.

"You're right," he said venomously. "I guess my desire for—justice—blinded me. Slap them in jail, Sheriff Baynard. Then come over to the house. I want to see you—*very much.*"

"Be right over," replied Cole impassively, and motioned his men toward the courthouse.

Ten minutes later a white-faced Esther admitted him to the house.

"Uncle Sutton is in a terrible rage," she whispered. "What in the world have you done, Cole?"

"I don't reckon he's mad at me," said Cole easily. "I just rounded up half of Kehoe's gang for him. He wouldn't exactly hate me for that, would he?"

He smiled down at her, but the violet eyes were still troubled as she knocked at the office door. Cole nodded reassuringly, then entered the room.

Perry was pacing the floor, but as Cole entered he stopped and wheeled

to face the sheriff. His voice and actions were under perfect control, but it was the entire absence of hot anger that marked him more than ordinarily dangerous.

"I'm just wondering," he said ominously, "what excuse you can offer for flaunting me there in front of the town."

Cole eyed him steadily. "I'm not makin' excuses," he said deliberately. "Reasons, mebbe, but not excuses."

"Ah, then you have reasons? And what reason could you advance, may I ask, for making me ridiculous before the people that I have taught to respect me?"

"I reckon," said Cole slowly, "that the time has come for an understandin' between you and me, Perry. Suppose we set down and thrash it out."

Outside the house, leaning negligently against the wall close to the open window of Perry's office, was a man. As the words came to him he glanced keenly about and, perceiving that he was not being observed, sidled a bit closer to the opening.

Cole dropped into a chair and, pushing his hat back on his head, proceeded to roll a cigarette. Perry watched him for a full minute, his face muscles working and his fingers clinching and unclinching at his sides. Then, abruptly, he dropped to the chair at his desk.

"Go ahead," he said; and his voice was dangerously quiet.

"To begin with," said Cole easily, puffing on his cigarette to get it going good, "I don't like you worth a damn and you don't like me any better. I'm still wonderin' why I consented to stay in this town, unless it was because I sorta thought I could keep an eye on the girl that's workin' her fingers off in yore service."

"Why, you—!"

Perry half rose in sheer rage, but Cole eyed him steadily, and at last he slowly sank back into the chair.

"Keep yore shirt on," advised Baynard calmly. "I ain't near finished yet. Why you hate me I don't know and I don't care. The sooner I can finish this job and get out of here, the better I'll like it. But right now we have somethin' in common. We're both after Bill Kehoe. That's why I took the job of sheriff." He snorted disdainfully. "Sheriff! Hell, I don't even wear the badge. But I figgered I'd have all the men I needed to help me. Since then I've decided that it ain't a question of men. And that's why I acted like I did when you wanted to hang those fellas out of hand."

Perry was sneering. "I'm glad you're coming to the point at last."

Cole leaned forward in his chair, and his voice was edged with steel.

"Listen, Perry. Let's drop the personal feelin's for a minute. I'm honin' to get Bill Kehoe under the sights of my gun. You want him killed, too. We've got to work together on the deal. Now I slapped those jiggers in jail for a purpose. I knowed that we'd never catch Bill Kehoe by chasin' him. We must trick him somehow —draw him outa that pass where we can get at him. At first I thought of fixin' it so's he'd rob the bank; but on the way in I got another idea. If we hold six of his men in jail, what will Kehoe do?"

Perry stiffened. "He'll try to get them out, of course. And you figure to nail him when he comes after them. Hell, man! Why didn't you tell me what was in your mind?"

"How could I? Don't you realize that Kehoe probably has somebody planted in town here to keep him informed? If I'd 'a' taken you aside to explain, that person would 'a' seen me whisperin' to you. And then, when yo'd changed yore mind about the hangin', Kehoe might of been tipped off to the real plot."

The man outside the window glanced about himself furtively. He was risking much to hear this conversation between the lord of Perryville and his high sheriff, and now he

suddenly discovered himself in possession of information that would react like exploding dynamite should he be discovered here. He edged away from the window, suddenly anxious to get away from the place. He had heard quite enough.

Inside the room Sutton Perry sat staring at Cole Baynard while he digested this logical explanation offered by this far-sighted sheriff of his. At last he nodded reluctantly.

"You were right," he admitted. "But, damn it! It was hard to take."

"You don't have to take it," said Cole calmly. "Fire me. It won't make any difference in our plans, and it'll save yore face. Make Slim Hendricks sheriff. Gettin' fired will give me a chance to slip outa town. I'll cut a circle for the hills and lay low near the pass until Kehoe tries the jailbreak. If he goes along with his men I'll slip into his gang and nail him at the right time. If he stays behind, I'll have a chance to get to him while his men are gone."

Perry brought his fist down upon the desk. "It'll work!" he declared in a voice that trembled. "By Henry, it'll work!" The anger had disappeared from his face entirely. He smiled across the desk corner at Baynard.

"Cole," he said softly, "I'm asking your pardon for acting like I did. And this tommyrot about my not liking you—get it out of your head. Why, boy, I think more of you than you imagine. Enough, even, to overlook what yu've said to me today. After all, it was in the heat of anger. Now listen. I'm going to discharge you, but only because it will help the plan. Just as soon as Kehoe is disposed of, you're sheriff again—for life."

Cole got up. "I'll be on my way. I'll act right mad, of course, but I'm goin' to tell Slim. He'll have to be in on the deal. But don't tell a soul else. If nobody knows about it, there will be no chance of trippin' up."

Sutton Perry nodded and watched Baynard pass from the room and close the door behind him. A twisted smile was on Perry's lips, and quite suddenly he laughed aloud.

"Sheriff—for life," he repeated softly. "Wouldn't Ham Tygert appreciate that joke?"

Cole went immediately to his office in the courthouse. He was scowling, and the citizens who stopped him to offer their congratulations were given short answers. Slim had locked up his prisoners and was busy drawing the loads from an assortment of Colt revolvers and Winchester rifles. His face lost a bit of its worried frown as his boss entered.

"How'd you make out?" he asked anxiously.

Cole grinned at him. "I'm fired," he said. "Rumor has it that Slim Hendricks is booked to be the next sheriff."

"Like hell I am!"

"It's a nice title," said Cole musingly. "Didn't you say you wouldn't mind wearin' it yoreself?"

"Aw, that was before things started breakin' like they are."

"Listen, old-timer." Cole went on to explain the plan he had thought out and the part Slim was to play in it. At its conclusion Slim stirred uneasily.

"Yeah, that's a fine scheme, all right," he admitted. "But looky here, Cole Baynard, I don't like the idee o' yore takin' so much on yoreself. Now if I was to mosey along—"

"Won't do, old-timer. It's a one-man job, and at that it'll be hard to get into workin' distance without bein' seen. No, you stay here and run things from this end. I'll be seein' you again." He smiled grimly. "Sut tells me I can have the sheriff job back when I get Bill Kehoe. And he's promised it to me for life."

"Well," said Slim reluctantly, "I hate to see you go alone, but—take care o' yoreself, son."

"Shore will, Slim. And if anything should happen, why kinda keep yore eye on Miss Esther, will you?"

"Yo're danged tootin' I will. S'long, you old maverick."

Cole went across to the store and purchased some supplies for his blanket roll. Harper, the storekeeper, looked his surprise, and Cole explained shortly.

"I ain't sheriff any more. Goin' to shake the dust of this dam' town from my feet. Never did like it nohow."

Harper smiled thinly. "Lots of men found it didn't pay to hang around too long," he said.

"I guess that's right. And if you get an answer to that letter I wrote, just hold it for me. I might be back."

He tied the grub in his blanket and fastened the roll back of his saddle cantle. Then he mounted and rode slowly through the town, past the big mansion of Sutton Perry, and along the rough trail that led to the outside world.

It was hardly an hour later when he saw a thin ribbon of dust on the road behind him. His first thought was that Perry or Slim was sending him some warning or instruction. He pulled up the roan and waited. Then, when the rider had drawn near enough for recognition, he swore in amazement. It was the girl, Esther!

She drew up beside him and for a few seconds sat staring into his face as though not knowing how to explain her presence.

"I just heard," she said at last. "You —you're riding away for good?"

He smiled down at her. "No'm. I'll be comin' back—I hope. It's part of a plan, my gettin' fired. I didn't have a chance to tell you, and you mustn't repeat what I say. I'm goin' after Bill Kehoe, and I mean to get him this time."

"I understand now. I—I was afraid at first—Cole, I don't know whether I'm doing right or not. After all, Sutton Perry is my uncle. But I emptied his waste-paper basket this morning, and I saw part of an envelope with an uncanceled stamp. I thought I'd save it. While I was getting it off I saw your name written in a corner of the envelope. I—I put the pieces of the letter together. It had been written by you to the marshal of Quigley, Nevada, asking for information about your father. Cole, what was it doing in my uncle's possession?"

Baynard's eyes had gone hard and his jaw muscles stood out in little ridges.

"I don't know," he said quietly. "I gave that letter to Harper and told him to see that it went out on the stage. Afterwards I saw Harper go into your uncle's office. Tell me this: did your uncle come to this valley from Quigley, Nevada?"

"No. I don't believe he was ever in Nevada. He came here from a town in the next county. I don't remember the name. He made a lot of money there in a mine he developed. He called it the Golden Lily."

Cole staggered as though from a blow. "The Golden Lily!"

"Yes. What is the matter? What have I said?"

"Nothing. A—rather funny name for a mine. Listen, Esther, I can't go back now. I must keep after Kehoe now that there is a chance of getting to him. But I'll be back. Don't say a word about this to your uncle. When I finish with Kehoe I'll look him up. There are several matters I want to take up with him. Thank you—and good-by."

He raised his hat, wheeled his horse, and rode rapidly away before she could see how her information had upset him. For quite suddenly a whole new line of conjecture had been opened to Cole. He was thinking just then of his mother as she had been in his boyhood days—of her fair skin and golden hair. Cole's father had affectionately called her "his golden lily."

The mine from which Sutton Perry had extracted his wealth could have been named by only one man. And that man was Cole Baynard's dead father!

## CHAPTER VII

### *Kehoe's Little Joke*

IT was dusk by the time Cole reached the hills to the north of Perryville. He had consumed more time than he had intended on his roundabout trip, but it had been necessary to be extremely cautious in order to remain undetected by the lookout that he did not doubt Kehoe had posted high above the pass. Now he felt sure that, while the journey had been a trying one, his careful approach had not been noticed; that, after all, was the main thing.

He stopped by a little spring to water his horse. Although he had not eaten since morning, he was not hungry. The thought of at last coming face to face with Bill Kehoe was an all-consuming one; he found it hard to curb his impatience while the horse drank.

As to just how he would accomplish his task, Cole had not the slightest idea. In some way he must determine whether Bill Kehoe intended to ride with his men on the rescue. If Bill went, he must find a way to follow. If Kehoe remained, he would face him in the pass, brand him as the murderer of his father, and kill him. The fact that Kehoe might outshoot him never once entered his head. It was a plain case of gun justice, and there could be no failure.

The stars were shining by the time he reached the entrance to the pass. Later there would be a moon, but just now it was very dark. Cole sat his horse thoughtfully, seeking a way to determine that which he must know before he could plan his course. Kehoe must be camped somewhere near; just how near Cole had no idea. It was extremely dangerous to venture into the pass, yet by remaining here he would learn nothing.

Cole swung lightly from his horse and started cautiously forward, leading the animal. Desperate needs called for desperate measures; just how desperate was the chance he took, Cole at the time did not realize. He did not see the two motionless figures sitting their horses in the deep gloom of the pass—had no inkling of the danger until his roan abruptly stopped.

Cole felt the reins tighten in his hand, but before he could make a move the horse neighed shrilly. At once came a sharp question:

"Who is it?"

Cole did some swift thinking. A sudden movement would betray his position and draw the fire of the guard. Yet it was not the danger to himself that halted him on the verge of flight; it was the knowledge that even were he to escape, Bill Kehoe would know that his movements were being watched. He would become suspicious and wary; perhaps he would abandon any plan he might have to rescue the six in the jail, thus postponing the reckoning which Cole was so anxious to force.

All this flashed through Cole's head in the split second following the challenge. He obeyed a sudden hunch.

"I'm lookin' for Kehoe," he said firmly.

"Yeah?" came the voice from the darkness. "Well, strike a match and hold it so's we can see you good."

Cole did not hesitate. He knew he was gambling with death, but he struck the match on his boot-heel and held it so that his features were clearly revealed.

"Hell!" came the gruff exclamation. "It's that jigger who come through the pass the other day. Mebbe Sut's returnin' Bill's message. Light another match, fella, and hold it."

Cole obeyed. Two horsemen rode out of the shadows, and one of them, leaning from his saddle, plucked the gun from Cole's holster. The other expertly dropped a noose over his head and jerked it tight about his neck.

"Jest to make shore you don't git lost," he sneered. "Lead the way right

back into the pass, and don't try nothin' funny. Pete, you stay here."

Cole dropped the burned-out match and started into the pass, still leading the roan. Behind him he could hear the plodding hoofs of the outlaw's horse. Nothing to do now but bluff it through.

He stumbled over the uneven floor of the pass, turning to right or left as his guide directed. Presently he caught a soft glow above a rock cluster to his left, and at the command of the man behind him, moved in that direction. He came to a little gully leading at an angle away from the pass and entered it. Abruptly he turned a corner to find himself gazing at a campfire, around which were gathered over a dozen men. All of them turned to look; one of them got to his feet.

Cole felt the blood pounding in his temples. He was gazing into the bearded, bulbous-nosed face of Bill Kehoe.

"What in hell you got here, Dunc?" asked Kehoe.

"Picked him up outside the pass," answered Cole's captor. "Said he was lookin' for you."

"Lookin' fer me, huh?" Kehoe peered keenly at Baynard, and suddenly he ripped out an oath and his face purpled with rage. "Lookin' fer me, is he? Yeah, I reckon he is! Sut Perry's new sheriff, that's who he is. He's the jigger that sent four of our men to glory and six of them to jail! Damn you, fella!" With a sudden fierce movement, he dragged his six-gun from its holster.

Cole eyed him steadily. "I reckon you haven't heard the news, Kehoe," he said.

Kehoe paused in the act of leveling his weapon. "What news?" he growled.

"I ain't Perry's sheriff no longer."

"You was in office long enough to raise hell with my outfit," snarled the rustler chief. "By Gawd, yo're gonna pay fer it, too."

Again the six-gun threatened. Cole spoke, forcing his voice to remain even. "It's a good thing for yore six men that I was in office. Perry wanted to hang 'em then and there. I wouldn't let him. That's why he fired me."

Kehoe was staring at him, but Cole saw with some satisfaction that the Colt had wavered out of line.

"You wouldn't let him!" repeated Kehoe unbelievingly.

"That's it. Told him if I was a sheriff I'd handle the thing accordin' to law. He let me slap 'em in jail, but he fired me for it afterwards."

The gun dropped to Kehoe's side. "What was you snoopin' around here for?"

"I was tryin' to get into the pass without yore knowin' it," answered Cole truthfully enough.

"You didn't ride over here direct from Perryville," stated Kehoe. "Don't try to tell me you did."

"No, I didn't. I left Perryville travelin' west. I figgered it would be a good idea not to advertise which way I was goin'."

"Figgered Perry might decide to dry-gulch you, huh? Well, you was wise. That low-down coyote would murder his own grandma for the gold in her teeth." He shoved the gun into its holster and eyed Cole doubtfully.

"Dam' if I know what to do with you, fella. Mebbe everything yo've told me is true, mebbe it ain't. Anyhow, I'm gonna hold on to you. Me and the boys is goin' on a little party tonight. We cain't sleep peaceful with our buddies in Sut Perry's jail waitin' to be hung in the mornin'. When we git back I'll figger out what to do with you. Tie him up, Dunc."

The man called Dunc swung from his horse, and with two lengths of rope bound Cole securely. The end of the lariat which encircled Baynard's neck, he fastened to a tree.

"You can hop," he said, grinning evilly, "but not far. Better lay down and take it easy."

Cole's wrists were tied together behind him, his ankles were lashed so tightly that he could barely wriggle a foot; there seemed nothing that he could do but to follow Dunc's advice. At the moment his spirits were very low. When he had obeyed his hunch to answer the guard's challenge, it had occurred to him that he might not be recognized as the leader of Perry's men. In the event that he was, he had hoped that the stand he had taken in behalf of the captured men and his subsequent break with Perry might win his freedom for him. More deliberate reasoning must have convinced him that he could expect no mercy from Kehoe; but there had been no time for deliberation.

Cole forced himself to listen to the conversation of the men about him. Kehoe was outlining his plans for the jail-break as unconcernedly as though Cole were not present at all. The thing as Kehoe presented it was simplicity itself, dependent for its success upon the very speed of its execution. The entire outlaw force was to ride into town at midnight, dismount in front of the courthouse, and, leaving a heavy guard with the horses, break into the jail, overpower the guard, and liberate the prisoners. The whole thing should not take five minutes.

Cole smiled a bit grimly. What Kehoe did not know was that even then twenty armed men had been stationed near the jail by Slim Hendricks and were cuddling their Winchesters in eager anticipation of the very thing Kehoe proposed doing. A moment later Cole's complacency was shattered with a suddenness that was as startling as it was complete.

Two men came riding into the gully, their horses' shoes clinking against the stones. One of them was the man called Pete, who had been left to guard the pass. At sight of the other Cole uttered a soft exclamation of surprise.

It was the cleaver-faced Lew Gore!

Gore's lips were tightly compressed and his eyes were popping with excitement. He swung from his horse and ran to where Kehoe was sitting.

"What is it, Lew?" Kehoe asked apprehensively.

"It's hell, that's what it is! By Godfrey, Bill, it's good I heard what I did! Listen: Perry is onto yore raid. Slim Hendricks and twenty men are holed up in town ready to blow hell outa you when you ride in. And that new sheriff is snoopin' around somewhere. Layin' fer you, likely."

There was a short silence of complete consternation; then Kehoe swore harshly. Rising with the lithe swiftness of a puma, he glided over to where Cole was lying and planted a heavy boot in Baynard's ribs.

"So that's yore game, huh? Broke with Sut, huh? Gonna lay fer me, huh? Well, dam' yore haid, yo're layin'! And yo're gonna stay layin' till I git time to settle with you right."

He wheeled to address Lew Gore, who was staring at Cole in amazement.

"Where'd you git the news?" Kehoe demanded.

Gore nodded toward Cole. "Heard him and Sut talkin' about it. He had yore six men throwed in jail jest to draw you into town. You—you musta knowed this jigger's paw, Bill. Name was Baynard—Sam Baynard."

Bill Kehoe jerked erect as though he had been struck in the face. Just for an instant he betrayed his surprise, then he relaxed and muttered shortly:

"Never heerd o' him."

"That's funny," said Gore. "Perry said you—said you knowed him."

"Sut Perry lies," said Kehoe coldly. "I never seen the jigger. Shut yore trap and let me think."

Cole Baynard, lying bound in the shadows, drew in his breath sharply. So Perry had declared that Bill Kehoe had known the elder Baynard. Perry—not Gore—had known Sam Baynard in the past. Why, then, had

he concealed this acquaintanceship? Why had he destroyed the letter which Cole had written in the hope of getting the details surrounding his father's death? Was it because of the Golden Lily mine—the mine that must have been named by Sam Baynard? Had Perry in some manner defrauded the elder Baynard of the bonanza he had discovered?

Cole felt the cold sweat ooze out on his forehead. Bit by bit things were becoming very plain to him. The thought struck him that it might have been Perry himself who had killed his father. He dismissed this almost at once. Kehoe, too, had known the elder Baynard; that start of surprise had told the story. And Perry was not the man to do his own killing if he could possibly avoid it. No, it was more likely that Perry had hired Kehoe to kill his father and then in some manner had double-crossed his partner. That would account for Kehoe's enmity.

So reasoned young Baynard, and thus, indeed, it might easily have happened.

While these thoughts were passing across Cole's alert mind, Bill Kehoe had been walking back and forth before the campfire, hands locked behind him, frowning face glaring at the ground in front of his feet. At last he stopped and looked up.

"Where are Hendricks and his men hidin'?"

"In the courthouse," answered Lew Gore. "Mebbe you remember they's a hall runs clean through the middle of it, endin' at the cell room in the back. On each side o' the hall is a big room, one bein' the court room, and the other the clerk's office. They're hidin' in them rooms, figgerin' on trappin' yore men when they go down the hall to the cells. You know they's no rear door, account o' the cells bein' back there."

Kehoe was staring out into the blackness of the gully. Cole, watching the man's every movement, saw the evil eyes narrow with some intriguing thought—saw the heavy face broaden with a grin of delight. Kehoe turned abruptly to address his men.

"I got it," he told them. "Lissen. Every downstairs window in that courthouse is barred because o' the jail bein' on that floor. Hendricks and his posse will be in them two rooms, like Lew said, with the doors shut, waitin' fer us to go back to the cell room, where they'll have us trapped. Well, we're walkin' right into that trap." He turned to Lew Gore. "How do them doors open—in or out?"

Gore thought a moment. "They open out," he said at last.

"That makes it even easier, because they won't be no hinges on the inside," said Kehoe. "We'll ride in right on schedule, only we'll leave the hawsses behind the livery barn, and we'll go into the hall jest like they figger. But"—he paused to glare around triumphantly—"but a couple o' you boys will be carryin' pieces o' two-by-sixes with spikes drove through 'em. And before the gents in the rooms know what's goin' on, them boards will be slapped across the doors and nailed in place. Them doors is heavy; I reckon they'll find it kinda hard to bust 'em down, and the windows bein' barred will keep 'em from gittin' out that way."

The men gave a whoop of delight. Lew Gore was grinning.

"Boss, you shore are a fox! Slim and his men'll be penned in their own trap. We can yank them six boys outa the cells and be away before Hendricks can even git started."

Cole groaned aloud. The tables had been reversed with a vengeance. At one bold stroke Bill Kehoe had turned the promise of certain defeat into one of equally certain victory. Just how hellish was this plan of Kehoe's became clear to him a moment later.

The outlaw raised a big hand for silence, and got it. He was grinning wolfishly in the firelight.

"You boys are laffin' right hearty,

but you don't git the full force o' the joke yet. On the way out somebody's gonna spill about a gallon o' coal oil in a pile o' shavin's near the front door. Then somebody else is gonna drop a match in the pile. Jest think that over, fellas: bars on the windows, doors nailed shut, no way out the back, and the front afire. I reckon we'll start a little private hell of our own in Perryville tonight. Let's git goin'."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Flames of Hate*

COLE BAYNARD lay fighting the bonds that restrained him as Bill Kehoe, at the head of fourteen men, rode out through the pass toward Perryville and its unsuspecting posse. This thing that Kehoe proposed doing was devilish, unthinkable, but Cole did not doubt that he would push his evil scheme to its hideous conclusion.

The realization that Slim and his men were about to become the victims of Kehoe's fiendishness because of a plan primarily laid by Cole led him to struggle all the more desperately for freedom. Somehow, he just had to get loose, overpower his guard, and ride to warn the lanky deputy.

He soon found that struggling against his bonds was worse than futile. The ropes would not give a fraction of an inch, and without the use of his hands he could not loosen the noose about his neck. Dunc, the guard, had gone to the mouth of the pass to gaze eagerly toward the blank void that smothered Perryville.

Cole lay thinking and regaining his breath. It was useless to struggle; if he were to get free, it must be by guile rather than by strength. Carefully he conjured up before him every means by which a rope might be severed. There was a knife in his chaps pocket, but the flap was buttoned, and he could not reach it with his hands, so he dismissed that possibility.

Ropes could be burned through, but that required matches and a fire, the light of which would betray him instantly to his guard. Carefully he rolled over the ground within the radius of the rope, feeling with his bound hands for a sharp stone against which he might saw his bonds. There was nothing that would even begin to serve the purpose. He lay still at last, thinking hard. A knife, a stone, a sharp bit of steel or iron. . . .

Cole lay on his side and bent his legs at the knees, extending the heels of his boots toward his groping finger-tips. He experienced a thrill of gratification to find that he could reach the long-shanked spurs. He turned one of the rowels until he found a spoke with a sharp edge. If only he could use that!

He found a way at last. It was a difficult way, one that brought sharp cramps to the overstrained leg muscles, but it worked. He wedged a little stone between spur shank and rowel so that the spokelike affair would not turn. Then by placing his insteps against the tree trunk, he was able to force his hands down to where he could rub the rope against the sharp rowel.

It was heartbreaking work. Just one little nick at a time; but slowly the rope became frayed, and he could feel the tug of the spur rowel as it hung. The last strand finally snapped, and Cole stretched his numbed legs and began opening and closing his fingers to restore the circulation. Dunc came back from the mouth of the pass to glare at him, and Cole lay there on his side holding his hands behind him until the man had stalked back to his post at the entrance to the gap.

It was an easy matter to get the knife from his chaps pocket and cut his legs free, still easier to cast the lariat from about his neck. His six-gun had been tossed beside the fire. He picked it up and made sure that the action was free from dirt. Then, holding it ready in his hand, he walked down the pass.

The unsuspecting Dunc never had a chance. He wheeled at the sound of footsteps behind him, fell into a crouch and, snarling, went for his gun. The moon was coming up, and Cole could see him quite distinctly. He fired, and Dunc spun almost completely around before falling.

Cole kicked the man's gun into the blackness near the wall of the pass and returned to the camp for his horse. Dunc had a shoulder wound, nothing at all fatal, but one that would keep him out of the fighting for a while. When Baynard returned leading the roan, Dunc was sitting on a rock cursing monotonously and trying to stuff a handkerchief between his opened shirt and the wound.

"Go down and wash it at the spring," said Cole shortly. "You ain't bad hurt. And keep clear of me in the future."

"Don't worry," growled Dunc. "I'll be makin' tracks outa here before Bill gits back. Damn yore soul, how'd you git loose anyhow?"

Cole did not bother to explain. Kehoe and his men had been gone for some time, and the ride was a short one. Cole flung himself into the saddle and put the roan to its best pace.

It seemed to him that he would never reach the town. Every moment he expected to hear the crash of gunfire and see the surge of lurid flame. Yet he was nearly in Perryville before it started.

Above the soft thuds of his horse's hoofs, he heard the sudden *spang* of a rifle, followed by a half dozen reports at irregular intervals. Then a shrill cry sounded, followed by a perfect fusillade of rifle and pistol shots. Cole mentally pictured the trapped men shooting vainly through the nailed doors, crying out in sheer rage and alarm. He raked his laboring mount with steel and bent low over the saddle horn.

Down the single dirt street he flew. They would be working on the jailer now, taking his keys and unlocking the cells. Cole remembered their horses. Kehoe had stressed the fact that they would be left behind the livery barn where they could not be seen and shot at from the courthouse windows.

He kneed his horse abruptly to the right, risking a spill as he did so, and rode him along the side of a building to the alley behind it. Another quick swerve to the left and he was racing at undiminished speed parallel with the street and directly toward a dark mass that he knew must be the horses.

A startled shout reached him, and a six-gun seemed to flame in his face. He felt the rush of wind by his ear, then he had fired. In an instant his horse was crow-hopping in the midst of some twenty frightened animals, while the half-dozen guards fought to hold them.

Cole raised his Colt and fired again. His hat was in his other hand, and he waved it wildly, kicking at the bodies of plunging animals as he knee-rode his roan through the bunch. The lunges of the frantic horses became more frenzied. One of them broke away, kicked free, and went at a gallop down the street. A bandit cursed and dropped reins to reach for his gun. The roan struck him with a powerful shoulder and the man went down, still clawing for his weapon.

Then it seemed that the whole herd had broken loose and was stampeding down the alley. And at that instant there came a mighty burst of flame that seemed to light up the town like a photographer's flare.

Cole wheeled his horse and made for the open rear door of the livery barn. Stooping in the saddle, he rode the roan through the entrance, down the space behind the stalls, and out the front door. People seemed to be everywhere. Kehoe's men were backing around the corner of the courthouse, rifles leveled and firing. Cole heard their cries of rage when they found their horses gone.

Across the street, the storekeeper, Harper, came out with a rifle and started firing methodically after the bandits. More men joined him. A few of the trapped possemen in the courtroom appeared at the barred windows to empty their rifles into the huddle of bewildered outlaws.

One glimpse Cole had of Bill Kehoe as the rustler chief ducked around the burning building. He saw that Kehoe's face was distorted with surprise and a mighty rage. He was bellowing some command to his men, but in the confusion his words were lost to Cole.

In that brief instant, Cole might have shot the man, but he withheld his fire. When Kehoe dropped it must be with the consciousness that he had come to his death at the hands of the son of the man he had murdered. But that must wait. As vital as the showdown with this man was, there was another issue more important just now.

Cole jumped his horse past the corner of the courthouse, risking death at the hand of some excited sharpshooter as he did so. Dropping from his horse, he drew the neckerchief over his face and dashed through the leaping flames. The fire had not gained much headway as yet, most of the blaze coming from the burning kerosene.

"Slim! Where are you?" he shouted.

"In here, Cole!" came the muffled reply from the court room. "The danged son-of-a-dog got us penned in."

Cole ran to the door and tried to get his fingers beneath the two-by-six that had been nailed across it. He knew at once that he was destined to failure. The board fitted snugly against door and frame. There was no means whereby he could get a purchase. To remain any longer was to risk being trapped himself. He shielded his face as much as he could and staggered through the sheet of flame to the clean air outside.

Back in the alley rifles were popping as the aroused citizens harried the dismounted rustlers. On the side of the building somebody had procured a crow-bar and was vainly attempting to pry loose one of the heavy iron window bars. It needed no second glance to tell Cole that this method would require too much time to be effective.

He ran to the livery stable and seized a ladder that led to the hay loft. It was nailed insecurely, but he wrenched it loose and ran outside with it. Hastily he raised it against the wall of the courthouse. It just reached to the second-story window-sill. Running over to the man with the crow-bar, Cole roughly snatched it from his hands and ran back to the ladder, leaving the fellow staring and sputtering his indignation.

The second-story windows were not barred. Cole reached the top of the ladder and with one stroke of the iron smashed in pane and sash. Then he was inside the room and working by the dim light of the conflagration.

The floor was of pine boards, planed smooth. Quickly he jabbed the crow-bar in a crack, got a purchase, and pressed down. The board came away with a screech of protesting nails. It was getting hot up here, and a wisp of smoke was curling under the door. Cole gave another vicious jab, another strong wrench.

Men were coming in the window now, sensing some plan to get at the ones who were trapped in the room below. Willing hands dragged away floor boards until a wide space was made. Cole raised the iron bar and brought it down. Thin lath and plaster crumpled under the blow, leaving a jagged hole through which he could see the white upturned faces of the trapped men.

"Get a rope down to them!" he ordered sharply, and dashed across the room. He wrenched open the door, staggered back at the cloud of smoke that billowed through the opening.

then, choking and fighting for breath, reeled out into the hall. He found the door to the other room, yanked it open, and almost fell into the comparatively clear air inside. Pulling the door shut behind him, he went to work on the floor.

By the time he had pried up the boards, others had arrived. Cole left the rescue to them and fought his way back to the other room. Men were being drawn up through the opening one at a time. Cole did not pause, but descended the ladder to the ground and ran for the roan.

Somewhere between Perryville and the pass was Bill Kehoe—on foot. Once more he had slipped from Cole's fingers, but the third time would bring the reckoning.

Cole swung down the street and out across the range, headed toward Rustler Pass.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Kehoe Talks*

BEFORE he had gone very far, Cole began to overhaul members of Kehoe's gang who were retreating across the range in groups of two or three, firing doggedly at their pursuers. In order to avoid them, Cole edged his horse to the east, cutting a long arc that would lead him to Rustler Pass far ahead of the dismounted outlaws.

Kehoe would make for the pass, Cole felt sure. Rather than attempt to run the rustler chief down in the darkness, Baynard decided to ride directly to the pass and wait there for his man.

He reached the gap at last and walked the tired roan into its entrance. Cole rode cautiously, for despite his warning and Dunc's promise, the outlaw guard might have changed his mind about leaving before Kehoe got back. Cole was not challenged, however, and halted his horse some distance inside the pass, a bit uncertain as to the best plan of procedure.

That Kehoe had a permanent camp somewhere near, he felt certain. There would be fresh horses at this hideout and extra equipment. Without a doubt Kehoe and his surviving outlaws would repair to it to recuperate and reorganize after their costly jail delivery of that night. He finally decided to wait there in the pass instead of attempting to find their camp.

Cole swung from his horse and was about to loosen the cinches when a faint ruddy glow above the rocks caught his eye. Somebody was building a fire, apparently on the dead ashes of the one that had been blazing when Cole was a prisoner.

Baynard led the roan to one side and tied him securely to a stunted piñon; then, very cautiously, he walked toward the clump of boulders behind which the fire had been kindled. He reached the protection of the rocks and concealed by the protecting shadows at their base, stepped around to a place where his view was unrestricted.

Almost within an arm's length of him stood a horse with dragging reins and drooping head, too weary even to nicker. Farther ahead, a man squatted on his heels by a little fire, feeding dried sticks to the growing flames. Even as Cole watched the fellow raised his head and Cole recognized the cleaver-faced Lew Gore.

Gore turned his head, and Cole, following the direction of his glance, caught sight of still another figure standing in the gloom of the rocks. The man stepped out into the circle of light, and Cole gave a little gasp of surprise and satisfaction.

The man was Bill Kehoe.

Cole nodded grimly. The traitorous Gore, afraid to identify himself with the rustlers by riding into Perryville with them, had probably hung around the outskirts of the town. Kehoe, retreating across the range on foot, must have met him and forced him to share his horse. That would account for Kehoe's arrival at the pass so far

ahead of his men. The situation seemed to have been made to Cole's order. Before he could move, however, he heard Gore's voice.

"Well, she's a-goin', chief. Reminds me o' the courthouse blaze. That was shore some fire, Bill."

Kehoe grunted. "A lot o' good it done us. Damn it, everything's gone wrong. What become o' Baynard, and where's Dunc? Who stampeded them hawsses back o' the livery barn? I tell you, they's gonna be lots o' questions asked and answered when the men git in."

"Too bad the posse had their hawsses on the other side o' the street," said Gore. "Sut Perry was too slick for us that time, Bill."

"I dunno about that," growled Kehoe. "Don't see how he coulda had them hawsses stampeded; he didn't know where we'd left 'em. And they was six guards with 'em, too. If it was Sut Perry's doin's, somebody shore as hell tipped him off." He was glaring at Lew Gore.

Lew straightened slowly. "Why, now, Bill, you shore don't think—"

"Naw, I don't. You couldn't 'a' done it. But I ain't doubtin' that you would if you figgered it'd profit you any. And Sut Perry shore would pay han'some for my hide. Damn him fer a stinkin', lousy thief! I'm sorry that Baynard fella got away; I shore had a tale fer his ears."

Cole stepped out into the light, leveled six-gun in hand.

"Reach for sky, both of you," he said quietly. "Kehoe, I'm ready to listen to that tale."

For a few seconds both men stared at him in amazement; then slowly their hands crept upward.

"Gore," said Cole, "reach down easy and unbuckle yore belt. . . . That's right. Now go over and do the same for Bill; and don't get in front of him while you do it—he might decide to use yore body for a shield.... Good. Now both of you back up a few steps. That's enough."

Cole walked forward and kicked both gunbelts into the shadows of the surrounding brush. He caught sight of a bulge beneath Kehoe's left arm and knew that the outlaw packed a shoulder gun. He pretended not to notice it. Cole could never shoot a man in cold blood, even though that man was the murderer of his father. If Kehoe felt lucky, let him make a try for that shoulder gun. Kehoe's fate as a murderer lay, in a manner, in his own hands.

"Sit down," said Cole shortly. "I've got a bit of talkin' to do to both of you."

The two men dropped slowly to the ground on the far side of the fire. Both were careful to keep their hands in front of them, in full view of the man with the drawn Colt. Baynard stepped to one side of the fire and squatted on his heels, gun balanced easily in his hand.

"Kehoe," said Cole, "mebbe you know it and mebbe you don't, but this little sidekick of yores has been playin' both ends against the middle. Just the day before yesterday he told me that he knowed my daddy up in Quigley, Nevada, and was there when he was murdered. When I asked who killed my daddy he said it was you."

*"What!"* Bill Kehoe roared the word, and whirled to face the groveling man at his side.

"Easy," cautioned Cole. "Turn around, Kehoe. I'm doin' the talkin' right now, and I want yore attention."

"Honest to Gawd, Bill," wailed Gore, "Sut Perry made me do it! I couldn't git outa it. Didn't I make up fer it by tippin' you off last night?"

"You dirty little weasel!" snarled Kehoe. "I always knowed you was crooked, but I didn't figger yo'd double-cross me. I'll settle with you fer that."

"I tell you I couldn't help it," said Gore miserably. "If I had refused, Sut woulda suspected somethin' shore. And I figgered it wouldn't do any harm."

"You backed Perry's play right nice, Gore," said Cole steadily. "If Kehoe don't get the chance to settle with you, I will. But right now I want the truth of the thing. Why did Perry get you to say that Kehoe shot my father? Why couldn't he tell me hisself?"

"I don't know, Baynard; honest I don't. Sut jest told me what to say, and I said it."

"Then you never were in Quigley, Nevada?"

Bill Kehoe laughed shortly. "I can answer that fer you, Baynard. No, the dam' little skunk wasn't; and neither was yore daddy. Fact is, I don't believe they is a Quigley, Nevady."

"I was beginning to think that myself," said Cole. "A letter I addressed to the marshal of that town was destroyed by Perry so it wouldn't come back undelivered. And now since yo've started talkin', Kehoe, suppose you keep it up. Tell me this: did you kill my father?"

Kehoe bellowed a protest. "Hell, no! I should say not, fella! Why, yore pappy and me was as thick as—"

Cole interrupted sharply. "When Gore suggested last night that you knew my father, why did you deny it?"

"Why—why—hell! It wasn't none o' his business nohow! And besides I figgered—uh—that Sut was tryin' to frame me."

"You're a good liar, Kehoe," said Cole grimly. "But only when you have plenty time to think ahead. Right now I reckon the questions are comin' too fast for you. Here's another: who discovered the Golden Lily mine?"

"Why—yore pappy did."

"Yo're doin' better. Keep it up. Tell me this: where is the mine located?"

Kehoe was scowling at him, but the answer came readily enough. "In the Sawtooths—over in Calder County."

"Good. Now listen carefully, Kehoe. I'm out to get to the bottom of this thing. You see, Kehoe, for twelve years we never heard a word from him, and all that time I watched my mother grow old. I've watched her hair, that was once as golden as the sun, turn gray; I've watched the skin that was so smooth and fresh become wrinkled with lines of worry and anxiety; I've watched the lips that were always laughin' when I was a little fella, droop at the corners; I've seen her cry for hours at a time. Just because of my daddy, Kehoe.

"Mebbe you don't know what it means to have a mother; mebbe if you do her worries wouldn't get under yore tough hide; but me, I made up my mind that I'd find out what become of my father, and when I learned the other day that he was dead—murdered—I vowed that the man who had brought that misery on my mother was gonna pay in full."

He stopped and, with one hand, unbuckled the spur at the heel of his left boot.

"Kehoe, I never thought I'd turn savage, but I'm gonna know just what happened to my father if I have to torture the truth outa you. I'm goin' to heat this spur white hot in the fire, and I'm gonna run the rowels over your bare feet until you tell me what I want to know."

He jabbed the spur into the hot embers, then sat back on his heels and watched the man before him.

The cowardly Gore had spilled his breath in a long gasp of horror; now he was sitting with hanging jaw, eyes flitting from Cole to Kehoe. . . .

Cole had made his play deliberately. He did not intend to apply the hot iron to Kehoe's foot. He did not believe that he would ever be given the opportunity. Kehoe had a gun in that shoulder harness and would make a play for it before suffering such torture. If Kehoe were innocent, there was no reason why he should not tell what he knew; if he were guilty, Cole meant to give him a more than even break.

Kehoe sat on his heels leering at Baynard. Big, hearty, powerful, he showed not the slightest trace of fear or panic. Instead, he was smiling a bit scornfully. At last he spoke.

"Baynard, you ain't scarin' me none. Hell, do you take me for a baby? If I didn't want to tell what I know, you could go on with yore torture and be damned. Yo'd never git a word outa me. But I said I had a tale for yore ears, and I have. You don't need that spur. You can take it outa the fire; that heat ain't none too good for the metal. I'll tell you all about the death o' yore pappy."

Cole looked into his leering face, then pulled the spur from the embers.

"Go ahead," he said. "And remember, it's the truth I want."

"Well, it's easy told. Yore father was prospectin' around the Sawtooths and struck it rich. One night I was sittin' in Sut Perry's store—he had a saloon and store and post office at Calder—when Sam Baynard come in. He was all excited. Had a letter that he wanted Sut to take care of fer him. Said he'd been writin' home fer a year and never got no answer, but that this letter should fetch one. Anybody could see he'd struck gold."

Cole was rigid. "A letter!"

"A letter, yeah. Sam had writ one every month fer a year; didn't yore maw git none?"

"Not one."

"Why, now ain't that funny!" said Kehoe sarcastically. "With a honest, upright man like Sut Perry postmaster, too! Well, Sut he promised to git the letter out on the mornin' stage, and yore pappy left. I was sittin' behind the stove and Sut didn't see me. He edged out after yore paw and I figgered that he was aimin' to dry-gulch him. So I lit out after 'em. I was too late. Sut Perry shot yore pappy before I could git to him!"

There was silence for the space of ten heartbeats, then Lew Gore drew in his breath with a sucking sound.

"That—that tale is jest like Sut made me tell," he said. "Only Sut said it was you that follered and killed Baynard."

"Sut Perry lies!" said Kehoe vehemently. "He killed Sam Baynard and cheated his folks outa the mine that was theirs by right."

Cole's eyes were narrowed and his face muscles were very tense. Slowly the truth was coming out. Or was it the truth? Certain it was that one of these two men, Perry or Kehoe, had killed his father. Equally certain was it that since Perry's wealth had come from the Golden Lily mine, he must have swindled Cole and his mother of their inheritance.

"Tell me the rest," he ordered harshly.

"That's all they is," growled Kehoe. "But it shore oughta be enough to send you gunnin' after Perry. He's the jigger you want."

Cole got to his feet. "Kehoe, get on that hawss," he ordered sharply.

Bill looked up, scowling. "What fer?"

"Perry said you killed my father; you say Perry did it. Yo're goin' with me to face Sut Perry. We'll get the truth if it's the last thing we do."

Kehoe got slowly to his feet, his eyes fastened on Cole. "Now wait a minute, fella," he said. "You know I ain't safe in that town. I'd be shot on sight. I ain't goin'."

"I reckon you are," said Cole shortly. "We can make it before dawn, and we'll go straight to Perry's home."

The two men regarded each other steadily across the campfire; then Bill, with a shrug, turned toward the horse that Gore was holding. Suddenly he wheeled and his right hand flashed under the coat which the left one jerked open. The short-barreled gun came out and up—there was a double roar. The shoulder gun was wrenched from Kehoe's hand so violently as to make his fingers tingle. Across the fire Cole Baynard was watching him

through eyes like hard, brittle ice. A little curl of smoke was rising from Baynard's Colt.

"Don't try anything like that again," came the cold warning. "I don't want to kill you until I'm shore. Now fork that hawss."

## CHAPTER X

### *The Stage Is Set*

LEW GORE watched the two ride into the blackness of the pass, and his beady eyes were bright and calculating. As Baynard had so aptly put it, he had been playing both ends against the middle, and now that he had been found out it behooved him to cast his lot once and for all with the side that held the winning cards.

He was not slow in making his decision. Bill Kehoe would kill him at the first opportunity, he felt sure. Besides, Kehoe's luck was on the decline. His outlaw gang had been rent asunder and scattered to the four winds of heaven. Sutton Perry's throne was tottering, but it might be saved for him; and the man who did the saving would find himself in a position to demand and receive much. Lew Gore thought he knew that man.

The darkness had barely swallowed Cole and his unwilling companion when Lew Gore turned from the fire and started at a run deeper into the gully. He stumbled often, bruising his hands and knees, but he did not decrease his speed. It was essential that he reach Perryville ahead of Baynard and Kehoe.

He turned into another transverse passage and followed a downward slanting trail which cut deep into the heart of the hills. The footing became better, the defile broadened out, and at last Gore found himself in a wide, grassy park with the dim outline of corrals and sheds before him. One of the sheds was fitted with stalls, and here a half-dozen good horses were stabled and accessible for emergencies.

With fingers that trembled with eagerness, Lew found a saddle and bridle and hastily threw them on what he judged to be the best mount. The bridle was tight, and he was forced to sacrifice valuable minutes adjusting it. Then he was outside the stable and in the saddle, speeding back along the rocky labyrinth which led to the pass.

Once clear of the gap, he put the horse to its best pace, cutting a bit to the west to avoid running into Cole and Kehoe. He did not doubt his ability to reach town ahead of them. Both Baynard's horse and the one that Kehoe was riding were dog tired, and Baynard would have to exercise caution to prevent Bill's escaping. Then, too, Cole had no knowledge of the nearness of Kehoe's camp, and could not know that Lew would be able to find a mount so quickly.

His reasoning was sound; he had reached the little town while Cole and his prisoner had covered but two-thirds of the distance. The single street was deserted now, although the embers of the courthouse still blazed fitfully. Gore estimated that it must be between three and four in the morning.

He was surprised to find a light in Perry's study, and for an instant feared that he was too late. But even as his feet hit the ground, the door opened and Sutton Perry, fully dressed, stood outlined in the entrance.

"Who is it?" came the sharp inquiry.

"Lew Gore. You alone, Sut?"

"Yes."

"Gotta see you right quick," panted Gore, and ran up the steps.

Perry glanced at him sharply, then turned and led the way into his office, closing the door behind them.

"Sit down," he said.

"Ain't got time," answered Lew shortly. "And you ain't either. Sut, I'm shore provin' myself yore friend this night, and don't you forgit it."

"I never forget loyalty in a man," said Perry evenly. "You should know that, Lew."

"Uh-huh. Well, here she is. Baynard is on his way to town, and he's bringin' Bill Kehoe with him."

Perry's eyes lit with a sudden fierce fire. "Hah! Lew, that's fine news! Did he kill Kehoe?"

"No. And it looks like he ain't goin' to. Bill throwed down on him, and Baynard shot the gun outa his hand. He's bringin' him in alive to face you."

"Better still; I shall have the satisfaction of hanging him myself."

"Sut, I ain't so shore o' that. Baynard asked Kehoe who killed his pappy, and Kehoe said you did it. Cole's bringin' him here to make him prove it."

Perry's face went suddenly ashen. "Bringing him—here!"

"He shore is. And Sut, that Baynard fella is fightin' mad. Oh, I been hearin' a heap. Kehoe told Baynard about yore grabbin' off his pappy's letters and takin' his property for yoreself. I tell you, Sut, that Baynard fella is deadly! He ain't *blazin'* mad, mind you; but as cool as a—as a volcany jest before she busts. If he finds that Kehoe is tellin' the truth, he'll shoot you in yore tracks or hang you to yore own door frame. He was fixin' to make Bill come clean by runnin' a white-hot spur rowel over his feet. Says he's doin' it fer his maw that's worried herself sick over the old man."

Perry had sunk into his chair and had listened with tight lips and burning eyes. Now he jumped up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Then we got to be moving—right now," he snapped, and his voice was sharp with fear and anxiety. "That young hell-hound will do just as you say. Lew, you stick with me and I'll make you rich for life, you hear me? Man, I need you, and I'll pay you well."

"Shore, that's what I figgered, Sut."

"How much time—have I got?"

"A half-hour, mebbe more. I don't reckon any less. Baynard has to—"

"I know, I know. Listen, Lew. Run over to the Oasis and get Ham Tygert up. He's bunking over there. Get another man and send him riding out to the ranch for the boys. Have him send in every hand. Then try to find Slim Hendricks and his men and bring them too. They were out hunting down Kehoe's gang, but they should be back now. Then come back here yourself as soon as you can. And for God's sake, hurry!"

"Shore!" Lew Gore spat the word over his shoulder as he bolted through the doorway.

For a few seconds Sutton Perry stood by his desk gazing after the man. He heard him hammer on the door of the Oasis across the street, heard the gruff voice of Ham Tygert reply.

An unreasoning panic had seized Sutton Perry in its grip. His brain seemed numb—he couldn't think clearly. The orders he had given were involuntary ones delivered without conscious thought, prompted solely by the instinct for self-preservation.

And as he stood there, a picture shaped itself before his mind's eye. It seemed that he was staring again into the face of a dying man. He could see the bloodless lips move, could hear the faint words "God . . . will . . . reward . . ."

With a harsh curse, he wheeled and started pacing the floor.

Gradually the panic died and the ability to reason clearly returned. After all, he told himself, he was making a mountain of a molehill. Why should he worry? With Ham Tygert and Lew Gore to back his play, with the hard-bitten punchers from the ranch, to say nothing of Slim's posse, to reinforce them, and with the advantage of being forewarned, he could not lose if he kept his head.

He dropped into the chair by his desk, only to spring up again at the

thunder of hoofbeats in the street. He got himself in hand and deliberately sat down. That would be the messenger riding for his ranch, a bare four miles from town. He heard a man run across the street, and a moment later a knock on the outside door.

"Come in!" he called.

Ham Tygert, hatless and coatless and with only one overall leg tucked into its boot, came into the room.

"Hello, Hamilton," greeted Perry, and strove to make his voice calm. "Sit down. We're to have visitors, I am informed."

He repeated the story that Gore had told him, not even withholding Cole's knowledge of the letters he had intercepted. This was no time to conceal anything, and he knew that Tygert had suspected the truth for a long time.

"So," he finished, "it appears that the play is reaching its climax. The only two men in the world I have reason to fear are about to call on me in an effort to pry from me the truth concerning Baynard's father. I am setting the stage for the last act.

"It is needless to remind you, Hamilton, that your success is tied up with mine. I am your employer, and I am paying you many times what you would receive from another. If you stand by me in this emergency, and assist me in forever removing these—ah, obstacles to my continued peace of mind, I shall be more liberal in showing my appreciation than even you can conceive." He eyed his lieutenant calculatingly. "For one thing, there is Esther, you know."

"Yo're dam' right I know!" said Tygert vehemently. "I'd go through hell to git that girl, Sut, and you know it. Where is she, anyhow? I ain't seen her all day."

"I don't know where she is at present," said Perry. "But after all, it doesn't matter much. She can't be far away, and if we use our heads it won't be necessary for you to go through the infernal regions to possess her. Cole Baynard is bringing Kehoe here. They will find me here in my study, much perturbed over the destruction of the courthouse and tortured by my guilty conscience. You might say they are delivering themselves into my hands."

A knock at the door interrupted them. Instantly Ham Tygert was on his feet, six-gun out and leveled.

"It's Lew, Sut," came a muffled voice.

Perry waved Tygert into his seat. "Come in!" he called.

Lew Gore came into the room and nodded to Tygert. "I sent out to the ranch, Sut," he said. "Told the boy to kill the hawss but to git our men in pronto. Hendricks ain't come in yet, but I posted some o' the boys around town to tell him to come a-runnin'. Told 'em to send us word as soon as they caught sight o' Baynard and Kehoe, too."

"Fine!" approved Perry. He had regained his calm assurance. "I'm glad you posted lookouts. I thought of it after you left."

He took a screw-driver from a desk drawer and walked over to the door which led to the dining room. While the two watched curiously, he proceeded to remove the screws from the socket into which the bolt fitted.

"Hamilton, you and Lew will station yourselves in the dining room with the door closed. I will throw the bolt so that it appears to be locked. When I say the word *now*, turn the knob and push. You understand?"

Tygert's lips were drawn back until his teeth glinted in the lamplight.

"Yeah. And then?"

Perry eyed him coolly. "I imagine you can be trusted to use your own judgment then," he said, and added dryly, "it might help if you remember that Esther considers herself in love with Baynard."

"I'll settle that!" cried Tygert. "She cain't marry no daid man."

"I think we understand each other perfectly," said Perry.

Running footsteps sounded on the planks of the walk outside, followed by the opening and closing of the front door. A light tap sounded at the entrance to the office.

"Mr. Perry! Mr. Perry!" came a voice, quivering with excitement.

"Come in!"

A slant-eyed man leaped across the threshold, to stop suddenly and raise his hands overhead.

"Don't shoot, Ham! Hell, it's only me. Mr. Perry, he's comin'. Not more'n a block away. I hurried like hell—"

Perry seized Tygert and Gore and pushed them toward the dining room.

"Inside, quick! Chink, go with them and do as they do. Remember, Ham, when I say *now*."

He hustled them before him through the doorway to the dining room. Closing it quickly on their heels, he pushed the bolt into its socket, which was held in place only by the paint which covered it. From a short distance it appeared as though the door were bolted tight. Swiftly he walked to his desk, pulled open a drawer, and examined a revolver that lay in one corner. As he closed the drawer, he heard two horses draw up at the hitching-rack. A moment later a knock sounded on the outer door. . . .

Perry found that the blood was thumping in his temples. Oddly enough, he was reminded of the night when he had raised his rifle to cover the dim form of Bill Kehoe.

Once again he called, "Come in!"

The office door opened and Bill Kehoe entered. Behind the outlaw, gun in hand, marched Cole Baynard.

## CHAPTER XI

### *The Curtain Rises*

SUTTON PERRY, actor supreme in this drama of intrigue and hate, came to his feet with every indication of glad surprise. The chalky cheeks and shaking hands might easily have been attributed to this emotion.

"Cole! You got him! Good work, man. I—"

"Sit down," interrupted Cole shortly. "Kehoe's my prisoner, not yores. We've come to talk with you, Perry. I've been findin' things out a little at a time, first from Lew Gore, then from you—"

"I never told you a thing," interrupted Perry, sinking back into his chair.

Cole smiled faintly. "It was the things you *didn't* tell me, Perry. Like destroyin' that letter, for instance. And tonight Kehoe talked, and he said plenty. If I'd believed all he said, I'd 'a' come walkin' in here and downed you in yore tracks, Perry. But I'm givin' you a chance. All I want is justice, and I'm goin' to have it if it takes a six-gun to get it. So I didn't take Kehoe's story as gospel truth any more than I took yores. I brought him here to face you. Between the two of you yo're goin' to thrash it out for me."

"Yes?" said Perry, and he was sneering.

"Yes. Kehoe, you sit down here at the corner of the desk. I'll keep my feet, and I'll be watchin' you both. Now, Perry, you can tell me yore story. First, though, I reckon I'll make shore that we're not interrupted."

He backed away from them, reached behind him, and turned the key in the lock of the hall door. Still keeping both men under his observation, he started sidling toward the door which led to the dining room.

"You needn't bother," said Perry easily. "You can see from where you are that it is bolted."

Cole glanced toward the door, saw that the bolt really appeared to have been shot home, and came back to the corner of the desk.

"You can start that story," he said

quietly. "Make it as complete as you can, and remember that confession is good for the soul."

Perry laughed shortly. "And suppose I refuse to talk?"

"In that case I reckon I'll just walk outa the room and let you and Kehoe settle it between you," said Cole.

It was not the solution that Perry sought. Tygert and his men would make short work of Kehoe, it was true, but Baynard might escape. And, after all, the stage was set; why not on with the play?

"Very well, Baynard, I'll tell you about it. To begin with, I did know your father, and it wasn't in Quigley, Nevada. It was right over in Calder County, where I kept a store."

"And a post office," growled Kehoe, his burning eyes on Perry.

"And a post office," said Perry. "The story, however, concerns the store. Sam Baynard came in one evening apparently laboring under stress of great excitement. It was easy to see that he had found gold. He—made some purchases, I believe, and when I asked him to step over into the saloon and have a drink he refused, saying that he must be on his way. He left the store hurriedly and rode off.

"Our friend Kehoe, here, was behind the stove, and neither I nor Sam had seen him. He got up, stretched, and saying that he was tired, left the store. I heard him ride away at a speed which, since he had appeared so dreadfully worn out, was suspicious to say the least."

He reached for the box of perfectos and selected one carefully.

"Have a cigar, Baynard? . . . No? Well, to get on. Sam and I were quite friendly, and when it occurred to me that perhaps Kehoe intended him harm, I saddled up, got a rifle, and followed. The story, you will note, is almost exactly as I had Lew Gore tell it. But there is a sequel that Lew knew nothing about."

"Go ahead," said Cole tightly.

"My worst fears were realized. Just before dawn, Sam, evidently realizing that he was being followed, turned and fired at Kehoe. I saw the flash and heard the report, but was too far away to prevent what followed. Kehoe shot back, and Sam fell. I fired at Kehoe, but in my excitement and—anger—I only wounded him. He rode off."

"You dirty sneak!" said Kehoe hotly. He was gripping the chair with both hands and his cheeks and bulbous nose were purple with rage.

Perry paused to light the cigar. "I carried Sam to his cabin," he continued, "and made him as comfortable as I could. He was mortally wounded, and died within the hour. But before passing, he recovered consciousness long enough to sign a will. That will left me the Golden Lily mine as a reward for my effort to save him."

"Why, you dam' lyin' polecat!" screeched Bill Kehoe, half rising from the chair. "You started out to kill Sam yoreself! You tore up the letters he writ to his wife tellin' her of his strike and likely urgin' her to come out to him! I know it, because Sam give you one to mail the night he come to the store, and Baynard's wife never got it. Shore you got a will. I know that; but I'm sayin' right here, Sut Perry, that Sam Baynard never knowed what was in it. By Gawd! I'm comin' clean. I *did* shoot Sam Baynard, but I hadda shoot or be shot. You, you dirty, lousy, crawlin' sidewider! you did worse than I ever thought o' doin'; for you robbed Cole and his maw o' what was theirs, and you did it through a will that likely you tortured from a dyin' man!"

The words came out like a torrent, tumbling over themselves in Kehoe's vehemence. During the whole tirade, Perry sat there with unblinking eyes and a face of stone.

Cole jerked erect at the confession of guilt on Kehoe's part, but it was no more than he had expected, and

he passed it over for the time being. If what Kehoe said was true—and Cole believed that it was—Sutton Perry was a greater villain than the killer himself.

"Sit down, Kehoe!" said Cole sternly. "Perry, that will—you have it?"

"Of course I have it," replied Perry calmly. "It's quite legal, I assure you."

"Then why didn't you tell me of it?"

"Why? Well, I didn't want to hurt you, Baynard. Your father had seen fit to reward me at the expense of his wife and child. It wasn't pleasant for me to have to tell you that—well, that your father had turned on his own."

Baynard took one short step forward and his open palm smacked against Perry's lying lips.

"That's enough," he grated. "My father was the kindest husband a woman ever had! When he left us, it was to better our condition. I'd believe Bill Kehoe, murderer and outlaw that he is, before I'd even listen to you. And accordin' to him you held back my father's mail, tortured him into believin' that we were as false to him as you would make him to us! Perry, I don't know why I don't drop you in yore tracks. Where is that will?"

"Damn you, Baynard! I'm not forgetting this. The will? Yes, I have it, and I'll take great delight in showing it to you."

He jerked open a drawer, unlocked the tin box with fingers that trembled, and pulled out a sheet of soiled note paper.

"Read it!" he grated. "And deny the signature if you can."

Cole took it and read it through. When he finished, his lips were tight.

"I'm not questionin' the signature; I wouldn't know if it was faked. But there are no witnesses to it."

"That makes no difference," barked Perry. "A dying man's will requires no witnesses."

"This one does," said Cole grimly. "Especially now that I know how you tricked my father into thinkin' you were forwardin' his mail when likely you was readin' every letter in the hope of findin' out his secret. You ain't denyin' that, are you, Mister Sutton Perry?"

Perry looked into the burning eyes and decided that the moment had come. The situation was getting a bit out of hand; not much longer could he stave off the disaster that threatened him. Cole was standing tensely a bare four feet from the corner of the desk. His gun was in its holster, but his arms were rigid at his sides. Kehoe was leaning forward in his chair, his evil eyes fastened on Perry's face much as though his very life hung on the words that were to come forth, as, indeed, it did.

Perry's eyes flickered toward the dining room door, and he cleared his throat raspingly.

"Well," he said slowly, "if you *must* have the truth, I'll let you have it—NOW!"

He fairly shrilled the word, and as it left his lips Cole Baynard was on him like a panther, hands outstretched toward the scrawny neck. Kehoe was on his feet at the end of the desk, his greedy eyes on the butt of Cole's gun, a bare ten inches from his hand.

The dining room door burst open.

"Now, you son of a dog, I got you where I want you!"

Cole stopped his insane rush and wheeled. In the doorway stood Ham Tygert and Lew Gore. Behind them crowded the slant-eyed Chink. And all three men had their guns cocked and leveled!

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Last Act*

WHAT followed occurred with such swiftness that description is difficult. Had Ham Tygert not delayed shooting until he could give vent to his crow of exultation, the

climax of Sutton Perry's little play might have been exactly as he had planned it. But Tygert, confident that he had the situation in hand, had to speak his little piece, and in the speaking of it sacrificed what chance he had to triumph.

Bill Kehoe, crouching behind Baynard, snatched the gun from Cole's holster even as that young man whirled to face Tygert. Bill stood to lose nothing; no matter what the outcome he was doomed. For a single slender fraction of a second, he held within the horny palm of his hand the life of any one of the men in the room—Baynard, Perry, Tygert, Chink, or Gore. In that one mad moment it is doubtful if he saw any of them but Gore.

Kehoe had promised to settle with the cleaver-faced traitor, and settle with him he did. With one sweeping motion of his powerful left arm, he brushed Baynard to one side, and simultaneous with this action the Colt roared.

Gore was knocked off his feet as though he had been struck on the forehead with the butt of an ax, and as he staggered backwards his outflung arm caught Tygert across the chest and sent him reeling. The man called Chink, standing behind the stricken man, caught the falling Gore and stood there with the dead man in his arms, staring foolishly.

"You dirty rat! Try to double-cross me, huh?" yelled Kehoe, and his thumb curled around the hammer for another shot.

He never got it in. Sutton Perry wrenched open the middle drawer, caught up the short-barreled revolver, and fired pointblank. Bill Kehoe staggered sidewise into Cole Baynard, a circumstance that was fortunate in that his huge form was between Cole and the gun when Perry fired a second time.

Cole felt the shock as the slug struck Kehoe, then he had grabbed the six-gun from the outlaw's lax fingers and fired just as Perry threw himself from the chair and behind the massive desk.

Baynard dropped the outlaw and leaped backwards to the door. Behind the desk Perry threatened with his gun. Outside the dining room door, Tygert was recovering his balance, curses rolling from his mouth. Chink had dropped the body of Gore and was in the act of ducking behind the door frame.

Cole reached behind him with his left hand and twisted the key in its lock. A hand appeared over one corner of the desk and the muzzle of Perry's weapon wavered in his direction. Cole snapped a shot that ripped splinters from the top of the desk, then ducked as Tygert fired. The bullet tore into the door frame over his head. Cole flung a random shot toward the dining room, then, before Tygert could fire again, wrenched open the door and ducked into the hall.

High-pitched yells and the thud of many hoofs reached him from the street outside. Escape from the front was impossible, but the thought of escape had not entered Cole's mind. He leaped to the street door and shot the heavy bolt, then turned and ran silently along the hall toward the rear of the house. In the gloom he paused long enough to reload. Moving as silently as a shadow, he slipped through the entrance to the dining room.

In the dim light he could see the form of Lew Gore sprawled on the floor. Chink and Tygert had gone through the doorway into Perry's office. Cole strode silently to the open door and gazed into the room.

Perry, six-gun in hand, was rising from behind the desk, calling to the men outside to kill Baynard if he tried to escape. Chink and Tygert were moving toward the hall door, expecting to find Cole crouched in a corner of the dark passageway.

"Reach—all of you!" snapped Cole, and stepped into the office.

Perry flung a quick look over his right shoulder, made a half-hearted effort to raise his weapon, but dropped it as Cole drew back the hammer of his gun. Chink stopped in his tracks, let the gun slip from his fingers, and raised his arms hastily. Tygert wheeled in mid-stride with the swiftness of a cornered lynx.

Cole saw the flash of his gun barrel as it swept into line, heard the heavy report of the forty-five, felt a stab of hot flame along his right thigh. He fired, and almost blending with the report came the sodden thud of the bullet on Tygert's chest. The fellow staggered, but somehow kept his feet.

"Want—the girl—huh?" he grated, and punctured the question with three shots.

Only the first one took effect. Cole felt the bullet strike him high on the left shoulder, and spun completely around at the impact. As he came about to face Tygert again, his leg buckled under him and he was down on his right side, Tygert's two last shots boring the air above him. From his position on the floor Cole fired again, aiming high, and this time Tygert was knocked backward to stumble over his own feet and crash into the wall.

The man was dying on his feet, but still he tried to raise his gun for another shot. His weakened muscles were not equal to the task. Slowly he slipped down the wall to the floor and toppled over sidewise.

"Hold it, both of you!" ordered Cole, but his voice was little more than a croak. Perry crouched at one end of his desk, unblinking eyes fastened on the wounded man, waiting, hawklike, for an opportunity to dive for his gun and finish the job that his lieutenants had botched. Chink still stood with his back to Cole, hands held far above his head.

Cole switched the gun to his numbing left hand and pushed himself to his knees. Things were a bit hazy before his eyes, but he managed to keep the gun steady as he struggled to his feet. His right leg was useless and bleeding profusely; he shifted the gun back to his right hand as quickly as he could for fear that his numbed fingers would be unable to hold it. On one leg he hopped to a corner of the room and leaned against the wall.

"Call off yore dogs, Perry," he ordered.

"You'd better surrender," said Perry. "You're trapped, Baynard, and you can't get away alive. Those men outside are from the ranch. Unless you throw down your gun and give up, they'll shoot you in your tracks sooner or later."

Cole caught sight of a hatted figure against one of the windows and threw a shot at it, shattering the pane and causing a hasty retreat on the part of the one who had ventured to peer into the room.

"Let 'em come," he said doggedly. "My last act will be to pay you in full, Perry. If you want to even hope to live, yo'd better keep 'em out of this room."

Perry watched him with calculating eyes. It was easy to see that the shock and loss of blood was affecting Baynard. The young man was swaying on his one good leg, even though he was braced in the corner. His head sagged occasionally like that of a man who is trying hard to keep awake. The leveled six-gun wavered out of line only to be jerked back abruptly as Baynard fought off the stupor which threatened to overcome him.

Slowly Perry began to edge along the end of the desk. The movement was taking him away from the gun on the floor, but it was bringing him closer to safety. His eyes were fastened on Cole like those of a snake on a bird. He saw Baynard sag, saw the gun muzzle lower until it was pointing to the floor.

Like a flash of light, he dived for the protection of the desk.

"Break in!" he screamed. "Through

the windows—back door! Break in!"

Cole jerked out of his lethargy as though a bucket of cold water had been flung in his face. The man Chink had turned and was reaching for his gun. Cole's weapon snapped into line, and the fellow hastily straightened and pushed his arms ceilingward.

The noise at the front of the house had ceased, and Cole heard the thud of boots as the men ran around to the rear of the house. He heard something else—the roll of hoofs in the dusty street. He tightened his lips grimly. To him all this spelled the end. Perry's men would soon be surging through the house. They would crowd into the room, and while he would get one or two of them, he would go down in the long run. It didn't seem to matter much. He was very tired. And he had failed at the very last moment.

The thought stung him like a whiplash. Now that he knew the truth, he mustn't fail! He hobbled toward the desk, forcing the wounded leg to carry him. Perry stared up at him, stark fear in his eyes.

"Get up," commanded Cole harshly. "Sit down in that chair and get pen and paper ready. Yo're writin' what I dictate."

Hastily Sutton Perry obeyed. He was willing to do anything to placate this madman who did not know when he was licked. No matter what he wrote, Cole Baynard would never live to make use of the document. Any moment now his men would come bursting into the room. If he could keep Cole preoccupied until their arrival. . . .

Perry looked up, pen poised in his fingers.

Cole had backed to the space between the two windows where he could command a view of his prisoners and the entrance to the room at the same time. His face was white beneath the tan, and his eyes glinted with the hint of fever.

"Write this," he commanded:

> I, Sutton Perry, do hereby admit that I acquired possession of the Golden Lily mine by fraud. The real owner of the money and property which I got from its sale is Mrs. Samuel Baynard of Algodones, Texas. To her I transfer all my money and interests acquired as a result of the sale, on the condition that she care for my niece, Esther.
>
> Sutton Perry.

Perry wrote, the sweat gathering in little drops on his forehead. Would his men never break in? He could hear them in the alley behind the house; there was a scuffle of some kind going on. Fighting among themselves, probably, instead of coming to his relief.

Cole spoke to the man, Chink.

"You—grab that pen and add this little note of yore own."

> I hereby certify that I witnessed Sutton Perry write this confession and personally saw him sign it.

The fellow took the pen from Perry and did as he was told. Carefully he signed his name and handed the paper to Cole. Baynard folded the confession and placed it in his pocket; and as he did so he heard the thump of feet in the dining room, caught sight through the open door of vague forms.

"Pull up out there!" he called harshly. "I've got Perry here under my gun. I'm surrenderin' to nobody but Hendricks."

He heard a sudden glad cry in a voice that thrilled him to the soles of his feet; then before him appeared a pair of very wide violet eyes, and the girl, Esther, had run into the room and was hanging on his gun arm talking to him almost incoherently.

"Cole! Don't shoot! We're your friends."

"Friends?" said Cole thickly. Objects were becoming indistinct. The room appeared to be growing darker instead of lighter.

Before his hazy vision appeared the homely face of Slim Hendricks, and the stern but firm visage of a

man he did not know. Others were pouring into the room—men of Slim's posse; and strange to say they were covering the man Clink with their weapons, and two of them were holding the raving Perry.

"What—who—" stammered Baynard weakly.

The girl's eyes were shining. "Friends, Cole, come to help you. Slim Hendricks and Sheriff Collins of Ocatilla County. It's the law, Cole; the real law, come to bring you justice!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Exit—the Villain*

IT was then that Cole released the grip he had been holding upon himself and sagged to the floor like a wet rag. They carried him over to a couch, pulled off his chaps, and the next thing he knew Esther was binding his wounded leg tightly with strips of muslin. When he blinked his eyes open he saw that her cheeks were stained with tears.

"Shucks, ma'am," he said. "You mustn't cry thataway. I tried to be easy with him, knowin' he was yore uncle."

"I wasn't crying over him," said the girl. "He's only my father's half-brother, and he's treated me worse than a servant. It was you, Cole. I thought they had killed you."

"Why, now, I'll be all right in short order," he said. "It's just the shock and loss of blood. But where did this Sheriff Collins come from?"

The girl answered quickly. "After I told you about that letter Uncle Sut destroyed I knew I didn't dare return to the house. So I rode on until I reached a town. I found the sheriff and told him that I believed you were in danger. I persuaded him to come with me. We met Slim and his men at the edge of town. Listen!"

Cole became aware then that Sutton Perry was fighting to stave off the disaster that threatened to overwhelm him. His voice was quivering with anger.

"Hendricks, what does this mean? You're sheriff of Perry County, and I'm demanding that you arrest this Cole Baynard."

"Sut," said Slim calmly, "I been tryin' to tell you they *ain't* no Perry County. Yo're in Ocatilla County, and have been right along. As long as nobody knowed how crooked you was folks was willin' to humor you and call this hunk o' country Perry County. When I seen how you was framin' things on Cole I started preachin' gospel; now that Chink's told us the story that Cole made you write out and also what Bill Kehoe had to say, I reckon they ain't a man in this country you can call friend. And if you think that you can stir the fellas that Cole fished out o' the burnin' courthouse against him, you shore got another think comin'. Yo're through, Sut, and you may as well know it."

Perry turned to the grim-faced sheriff of Ocatilla County. "Sheriff, I appeal to you. This is a conspiracy to ruin me. I'm demanding that you arrest Cole Baynard."

Sheriff Collins eyed him coldly. "Thought I heard you say jest now that you didn't recognize any law but Perry County law. Kinda changed yore mind, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did; I acknowledge you, Sheriff, as the legal representative of the law. Now I demand that you arrest Cole Baynard."

The sheriff turned without answering and came over to where Cole was lying.

"How you feelin', son?" he asked.

"Pretty good, Sheriff."

"You got that paper that Perry give you?"

Cole's eyes narrowed. "Yes. Also I'm keeping it. Sheriff, I'm not after a thing for myself, but my mother is entitled to this property and she's goin' to get it."

The sheriff nodded thoughtfully, then turned to Hendricks.

"Slim, git a hawss saddled. I'm takin' my prisoner back with me."

Perry came forward, a smile of supreme satisfaction on his face.

"Now, Sheriff Collins, that's what I call good sense. But I wouldn't care to cause you so much trouble."

"That's all right," said the sheriff blandly.

"But really, we can easily take care of Baynard here."

"Baynard?" asked the sheriff. "Who said anything about Baynard?" His eyes grew suddenly cold. "Get what things you want to take along. I'll give you five minutes."

Perry staggered backwards as though he had been struck in the face.

"Me! You're taking—*me!*"

"You, yes. Hell, man, did you think you could carry out this farce any longer? Yo've set up false courts o' justice, yo've held illegal elections, yo've had men murdered, and yo've written a confession admittin' that everything you got was through fraud."

"But the confession won't hold! It was obtained by force."

"Was it? Listen, you obstinate fool, this man Chink heard Kehoe tell of seein' you with a letter o' Sam Baynard's which you as postmaster should 'a' mailed. The letter was never received. Later you destroyed another one, right here at Perryville. Do you think the Government is goin' to overlook that? Do you really think you have a leg to stand on if Cole tries to bust that will o' his daddy's? If so, like Slim said, you got another think comin'. Now get what you can put in a saddle roll and come along. And thank yore lucky stars that Cole Baynard let you live."

So it came about that Sutton Perry rode from the town which bore his name in the company of the sheriff of Ocatilla County. And if the horse he rode was a sorry nag with jutting hips and a ragged trot, it was because Slim Hendricks had spent considerable time in his selection of a mount for the ex-boss of Perryville.

Two persons watched his departure from the doorway to the Perry mansion. One of them was propped against the door frame, left arm bound tightly to his body and right leg dangling a bit helplessly. The right arm, however, was quite good, although the young man found it necessary to pass it around the shoulders of the girl with the violet eyes in order to keep his balance.

Cole gazed thoughtfully after the two horsemen.

"I could have killed him," he said slowly, "but I reckon he's takin' a harder punishment right now. Once he had everything; now he has nothing. To a man like Sutton Perry, losin' money, and property, and power hurts a heap more than a bullet through the heart."

The girl clutched his arm, and he turned to follow her gaze across the dusty street. A body of men headed by Slim Hendricks had ridden up on the sidewalk to the very door of the bank. One of them flipped his rope over the wooden sign and jumped his mount to the street. With a screech of protesting nails the sign tore free.

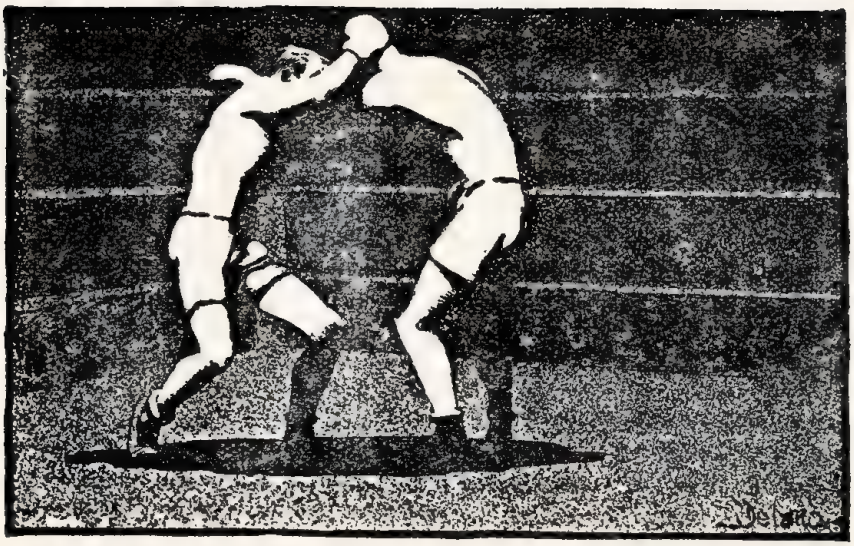
Slim kneed his horse up the steps and halted him in the doorway. He slapped a board across the top of the door frame and quickly nailed it in place. Then he turned and waved his hat at them. Through the early morning sunlight they could just make out the words:

THE FIRST BANK OF BAYNARD

The girl gave a delighted cry. "They've changed the name of the town," she said. "I'm so glad; Baynard is a much nicer—"

And then she stopped suddenly, for the arm about her shoulder had tightened, and eager gray eyes were seeking wide violet ones.

"I'm shore glad you like it," said Cole softly. "For you see I'm plumb determined that yo're gonna wear it the rest of yore natural life!"



# *EYE, EYE, SIR!*

## *By Edmond DuPerrier*

**Sapper has his name shortened.**

"SAPPER" MULLIGAN, a fight manager of the *genus* sharpshooter, sat at a table at the Nineteenth Hole of the Green Fairways golf club with two of his arch enemies, Slim Dugan, promoter, and Honest Dan Smith, honest fight manager, and let go a barrage of words.

He had just beaten the two men with him in eighteen holes of golf to the tune of twenty-three dollars, and his ego was swelling within him.

"As a manager, you'd make a good golfer," Sapper told the fight manager across the table. "Yes Dan, the way you play your boys is just the way you made that mashie shot on the 12th hole. Always in the rough. But the way I—"

"Yeah," growled Honest Dan, "You play them all down the fairway, don't you! No wonder you play those dog-leg shots so good. You'd be able to par a golf course made like a corkscrew with supreme ease."

"In your hat," Sapper answered genially, downing a liberal portion of the dynamite in the glass before him. "Little Sapper is usually sitting on top."

Honest Dan's temper rose. He always played fair with his boys, win or lose, and it angered him to see the sharpshooting manager take life with such ease.

"What's more," boasted Sapper afresh, "I hear you're trying to pick up a boy to win the coast welterweight tournament. I'm liable to bet a few pennies that any boy you can pick up that can go more than one round without falling on his nose, will be beat by the boy I've got up my sleeve."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Double-yeah!" answered Sapper. "How's your pocket-book. Still got the padlock on it?"

Slim Dugan, promoter, had been silent until now. Then with an interested grin on his face, he turned to Sapper.

"You mean you'd like to match boys with him—sight unseen! That sounds like a good idea—"

"Yes, and that's the idea," cut in Sapper. "It isn't the boys always. It's the manager that picks them, and tells

them what to do. And can I pick them—and can I tell them what to do!"

Crossing the legs of his plus-sixes, the colors of which could be heard from one end of the golf course to the other, he eyed his opponents with a satisfied ego.

Honest Dan lifted a justifiably angry face. He treated his boys right—gave them the breaks when they were going up. He was a good manager, a right one. He exploded.

"You little sharpshooter!" he snapped. "I've got good boys. I get good boys. And I treat them better than any man in this town. Name your price—and drag on your boy."

Sapper smiled. "I'd like to cut off about two grand of your income, Dan, my boy. How do you like that?"

"Suits me right down to the ground. Put up your dough. If there's anything but tissue paper inside that hundred-dollar bill you're carrying!"

Sapper reached in his pocket, and took out the roll in question. This time he proved that the roll he carried was genuine. For he peeled off the size of his bet into the promoter's hands. "There you are," he said. "Now, put up or shut up."

Honest Dan took out his check book.

"I don't flash my roll," he explained. "My check good?"

Sapper nodded. He knew Honest Dan. If Honest Dan wrote a check, he would cover it if he had to mortgage everything he owned.

"All serene," Slim Dugan said, lifting the eternal contracts from his pocket. "I'll sign you boys right here and now—for two weeks from Friday."

"There's something I should tell you boys," Sapper grinned. "You better hedge that bet on my boy, and I wouldn't like to see you hurt."

"In your hat," growled Honest Dan.

"Not in yours," answered Sapper. "Because, after two weeks from Friday, you'll be bareheaded—and barefooted. *Au revoir!*"

"Olive oil yourself," snapped Honest Dan, and they parted.

SAPPER entered the lobby of the Norton Hotel, where he stayed, with a very satisfied feeling. For Sapper had done an excellent stroke of business. Sapper never entered anything blindly. And he had not done so this time.

For he had signed Willie Wade for several fights just the day before. And Willie Wade, as anyone who followed the fighters with interest knows, was the leading contender for the welterweight championship. He had been at outs with his own manager, and was trying to pick up some small change on the coast. He had bumped into Sapper, knowing that he was a fight manager familiar with the territory, but not knowing what kind of a manager he was. Sapper had talked long and fast and with excellent results.

It was, in fact, the best stroke of luck he had ever had in his life. And those two saps had fallen for that sight-unseen stuff! He was walking on air.

"Message for you, Mr. Mulligan," the clerk at the desk said, as he handed him his key.

"Come right away—St. Vincent's Hospital—room 301. Wade."

With a sinking sensation around his heart, Sapper rushed out, grabbed a taxi, and hurried to the hospital. In room 301 he found Willie Wade, sitting up in bed. The fighter was in a swath of bandages.

"What happened, Willie?" Sapper demanded in a choking voice.

The fighter's tones were bitter. "I live in New York where they have the heaviest traffic in the world—and I come to this burg to get smacked down by a driver. When there is only him and me alone on the street."

"Did it bung you up much?"

"Bung me up? Two ribs busted. A broken arm. And more bumps and bruises than a battalion of fighters would get in a lifetime. I'm pulling

out of here as soon as I can move—back home where I'm safe."

"And you can't fight," Sapper said to the room at large.

"Fight! I had plenty fight with that lizzie. I ought to charge you damages for talking me into staying over in this lousy town. Fight! Hell!"

"I'll be going," said Sapper quickly, when he heard the word damages. And he went out into a world that had suddenly darkened. The rapid eclipse of his fortunes had him punch drunk.

He was still in this bewildered mood when he dropped from a taxi in front of the Norton. He had to have a fighter for the bout two weeks from Friday. And there wasn't a fighter in town who was a winner.

He stepped forward, and suddenly a human projectile emerged from the hotel, zoomed across the sidewalk, caught Sapper around the legs. Together they went down among the cigarette butts and oil drippings in the gutter.

"What the—" Sapper started. A roaring voice interrupted him. It was George, the burly porter of the hotel.

"And if youse comes back in here again, I'll bate yuh within an inch of yer life."

Sapper rose to his feet and tried to adjust his sartorial splendor, meanwhile gazing upon the victim of adversity who had barged into him so abruptly. He was a sturdy, dark-haired man with peculiar-looking eyes. He rose slowly to his feet.

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "It wasn't my fault. But if I'd only gotten the clerk's eye."

"Gotten his eye?" said Sapper in a puzzled voice. "What do you mean?"

"Look me in the eyes steadily," the man said. His voice was calming, persuasive. Sapper found himself looking deep into those strange eyes. They were like a magnet. He couldn't get away from them.

And voices were speaking to him. Someone was telling him things. There was something that made him put his hand into his pocket and hand the stranger a ten-dollar bill. And everyone knew that Sapper had one-way pockets. To give a dime to a bum was as big a feat as having a tooth pulled. But here he was passing his dough over like a little lamb.

It was incredible. He didn't know what was happening. He did know that nothing in the world could have stopped him.

Then the stranger snapped his fingers. Sapper came out of the strange trance. He had been fully aware of what had been going on, but he had been unable to do anything about it. Now his natural instincts came immediately to the surface.

"Hey, you! What's going on here?" Sapper snapped, doubling his fists. "Give me back that dough, or I'll tear up a couple of blocks of pavement with you."

With a sigh, the stranger relinquished his hold upon the ten-spot. Not until Sapper had returned the bill to its proper place among its fellows did his face crack a smile.

"Say, that wasn't a bad dodge, brother," he said. "What was going on?"

In answer, the man drew a card from his pocket, and passed it over with a flourish. "You see," he said. "If I could have got that clerk's eye, I might have got my baggage anyway. But he knows me, you see."

Sapper examined the card. It was very fancy. But amidst the furbelows and curlycues he made out the words: "Lobo the Great. World Famous Hypnotist."

"Well, well," murmured Sapper. "A guy that's world famous ought not to be getting thrown out of places like this. What's the idea? I can swear that you have the stuff."

"I've got it all right," Lobo said wearily. "But where am I going to use it? There's about as much use for a hypnotist these days, as the little hula girls in Pago-Pago have for mink wraps."

Sapper straightened up with a big smile on his face. He reached over and grabbed the man's hand. "You're all wet," he said. "Little twists, even in Pago-Pago, are always grabbing for mink wraps. And I know one swell spot for a hypnotist."

"What do you mean?"

"Can you box?" Sapper demanded sharply. "And what do you weigh?"

"I did some boxing in school," the hypnotist said. "And I weigh about one-forty-five all wet."

Sapper stood off and looked at him. "Would you fight to make some dough?"

"I'd fight my weight in wildcats to end this depression," the hypnotist said sincerely.

"Well, come on with me—right back into the Norton," said Sapper. "For you are going to do some fighting—and some winning."

Together they walked back into the place.

"Oscar," said Sapper to the clerk. "Give Mr. Lobo a room. And fast. I am guaranteeing his account—for the next few days anyway. After that, I think Mr. Lobo can take care of himself."

THE following afternoon Sapper made a trip to a small neighboring town which held fights every Thursday evening. In the rear of a pool room he discovered Mr. Sarpolis, the promoter of fights.

"How would you like to let one of my boys work here next Thursday?" Sapper asked.

"Huh!" snorted the promoter. "The last time one of your boys worked here it was to work a betting razzle-dazzle. I couldn't see you."

"Listen," said Sapper. "Get your toughest boy and give us the worst spot in the card. And what's more, you don't have to pay us a dime for the fight. How's that?"

The acquisitive soul of Mr. Sarpolis, equalled only by that of Sapper Mulligan, was captivated by this idea. If it meant no outlay of cash, Mr. Sarpolis could close his eyes to many things.

"Okay, Mr. Mulligan," he said. "You get the second preliminary and I've got a tough blacksmith welterweight out here that's been crying for a spot on my card."

"Fine," said Sapper, rubbing his hands together. "I've got to find out if my boy can hit. That's the rub with me. Nothing funny. All serene. Now if you've got a speak-lightly in the village, Mr. Sarpolis, it will be my pleasure to buy you a little drink of something to ease the heat of the day."

They repaired to a speakeasy, and later Sapper left the town of Gladstone feeling very perky, indeed. Things were working out splendidly, and he was going to show Honest Dan Smith a few thises and thuses about the fight game, which had hitherto been a closed book to that gentleman.

Sapper was no person to miss any bets. Despite the brilliance of his new hypnotist idea he wanted to be sure that the Great Lobo contained a paralysing shock in his left fist as well as in those powerful eyes.

When he returned to the hotel, he found Lobo shooting African golf with a colored chauffeur. Lobo was very pleased with himself.

"What a break," he said. "Here I was waiting around doing nothing when this smoke shows up. He's tired loafing around so he loans me a dime to start in. I had him flat in no time. He made the mistake of looking into my eyes."

With averted head, Sapper spoke sharply to his new fighter. Inside he was pleased. He wouldn't have to buy the man's grub today at least.

"All right," he barked. "We'll see how good those eyes are on Thursday night. You're fighting out in Gladstone. If you do good out there, we'll have some important dough for you. Maybe a hundred or so."

"That being the case, Lobo the

Great will produce," said that individual stiffly.

IT was with an inward groan that Sapper watched the first two minutes of that fight on Thursday night. Lobo was a clown. He ran, he danced, he dodged. And the tough blacksmith chased him from corner to corner without a return.

The crowd laughed and roared and squealed. Sapper felt that if Lobo had ever done any boxing, it had been with apples. But suddenly the tempo of the fight changed, and the howls of the crowd with it.

Lobo was boxing straight now. He was weaving in and out, sparring sharply. The blacksmith was throwing punches from all angles. It looked as if Lobo would be smothered with them.

But not one landed!

Then Lobo's right hand shot over. Biff! And the blacksmith went down in a solid heap.

"Out as cold as an old horseshoe," Sapper said with a lift of his heart.

"Take these things off—quick," ordered Lobo as he swung back to the corner.

Sapper jerked the gloves from his hands. Lobo rushed over to the corner, and under the cover of shaking hands he snapped his fingers. The blacksmith came out of the trance.

But it was a beaming Sarpolis who met them in the dressing room.

"Mister Mulligan," he said admiringly, "sometimes I have some funny ideas about you. But there you have a fine boy. He is a boxer, a comedian, a socker. What more can a man want?"

"What more indeed," agreed Sapper, thinking of the fight to come.

TRUE to the agreement of this strange, sight-unseen fight, both boxers did their training in private. Lobo did not train much. Both he and Sapper wandered out of the city to the roadhouses, and as Lobo said that all he had to train was his eyes, Sapper did not urge the training grind upon him.

Sapper, too, was in an exceptionally generous mood, what with the small fortune to come to him. They looked upon the ale when it was amber, the wine when it was red, and the gin when it was transparent. And a nice time was had by both.

And when they went to the dressing rooms on Friday night, Sapper and Lobo had full hearts, and the hope of full purses. It was indeed a splendid feeling to know that it was all set. Never had Sapper been happier.

"You certainly look splendid this evening, Sapper," Slim Dugan said, meeting him in the lobby.

"Plenty of sap in old Sapper," agreed that worthy as he brushed past the promoter. "Did my friend Honest Dan get his bet hedged?"

"You just know he did," Dugan said. "All hedged round with luck."

From under his arm, Sapper took a small package. "Tell him to use this when it's all over." And he went on.

He gathered Lobo into a corner of the dressing room.

"No funny business now. Just get out there and make it look as good as you can until you get this bird's eye. Then give him the powder without delay."

"Righto, sir," said Lobo feelingly.

"And if there is a slip-up," Mulligan warned, "I'll be waiting outside with a club."

"Mr. Mulligan," said Lobo, "as a showman of long standing, I know my onions, and a few other vegetables, including the spinach. So don't worry."

Sapper, heartened by this confidence, increased it with a pull from his pocket flask. Then he went out to look at the crowd. There would be, above the bet, a fairly nice house to collect from.

In the course of time, the preliminaries had been run off, accompanied by the impatience of the crowd. For

the story of the sight-unseen fight had been highly boosted in the press. Slim Dugan had handled the publicity with fight promoter's skill, and the cards simply read Dash meets Dash, with two square, empty boxes to denote the fighters' pictures.

"Bring 'em on!" the crowd yelled, as the last punch-weary fighter was assisted to the dressing room.

Sapper returned to the dressing room, gathered up Lobo, and started down the aisle to the ring. Down the aisle on the farther side of the arena came Honest Dan Smith. His fighter was swathed in a brilliant blue robe, and possessed a sturdy head, and a pair of crumpled ears. Evidently he had taken plenty.

Sapper jumped jauntily up into the ring, and helped Lobo up into the corner.

Honest Dan came over to inspect the bandages.

"Aren't you going to give my boy the once-over, Sapper?" he asked.

"I don't care if your boy has cast-iron fists," Sapper returned confidently. "He isn't going to last long enough to count up to a hundred."

"Okay—if you think so," said Dan.

"On your way, sucker," Sapper said.

Honest Dan made his departure, and walked across the ring. Presently the referee called them to the center of the ring. Sapper tried to get a look at the hypnotist's opponent, but the fighter kept his head hung and his eyes on the canvas.

"Just foozle around this first round," Sapper whispered as they returned to the corner.

"Okay, Sapper," Lobo answered.

*Gong!*

The dark, sturdy boy from the other corner came out like a shot. Lobo met him easily, shoved out his left hand, and danced out of range. The dark boy followed like a whirling dervish. His fists were working overtime, and he was moving in constantly.

But Lobo, somewhere in his training had learned the gentle art of bicycling. He was always on the move. And he was a showman, too. He made the cash customers believe that he did it in a spirit of fun. Sapper was willing that Lobo should act it out, for he did not think that this was to be the end of their joint career in kidding fight managers out of their money.

The eagle eyes of the hypnotist were great stuff—if they worked out all right. And now they were going great guns.

*Gong!*

Lobo came back to his corner, and Sapper met him with a smile. Lobo was breathing a little heavily, for speakeasy gin and beer was not the best training substance.

"Going to put her over this time, eh?" Sapper whispered genially.

Lobo seemed preoccupied. He shifted on his stool. "Huh?" he grunted.

"I said you were going to put it over this round," Sapper said sharply. This time it was not a question. It was a command.

"I hope so," mumbled Lobo.

"You better," growled Sapper, "or you'll go out of here in a wooden kimona."

The gong rang again, and Lobo went forth. Sapper was waiting—waiting for that halting on the part of Lobo's opponent, that vacant stare into space, and then that vicious smack square on the chin.

It did not happen. The stout boy was boring in more persistently than ever. He was moving in now with a grace that he had not shown in the first round.

"He's warming up!" a fan shouted.

"Take him, boy. Make him dance another tune!" more voices shouted.

Lobo was suffering a heavy attack. And Sapper knew that Honest Dan Smith's boy packed a load of dynamite in either hand. He shouted for Lobo to get in there. He did not know that the terrific punch that Lobo had landed in that trial bout had been a mental, not a physical one.

But Lobo was not acting according

to Hoyle. He was not using that eagle, hypnotic eye. Not that he didn't seem to try. For he was diving into a clinch at every opportunity, and mumbling under his breath. But all to no avail.

*Crack!*

With a thump that could be heard all over the ring, Lobo took one smack on the chin. He went down like a ton of brick. But he got up again. It was a struggle, but he got up. He staggered into a clinch, was shoved out of it, and rolled backwards, arms limp.

Honest Dan's boy was a killer type. Swift as an avenging angel, he swung one from the canvas. It landed flush on Lobo's chin. And suddenly the boy switched from the chin to that gin-softened stomach. Lobo went out like a light.

It was a snarling, angry Sapper who carted his stricken fighter back to the dressing room. A killing rage roared through him. The inert hypnotist was given every ounce of Sapper's recuperating powers—only so that Sapper could return him to that vale of blackness whence Honest Dan's boy had sent him.

The hypnotist stirred—awakened. His eyes blinked for a moment. Sapper met those eyes with an angry stare. He threw the daggers of his eyes into those peculiar ones on the dressing table.

"You double-crossing—"

"Rigid!" Lobo snapped, sitting straight up. Sapper went into a daze. He had lingered too long before those eyes. He was caught.

"Go to sleep," Lobo said in that persuasive, calm voice.

Sapper sank upon a chair. His head dropped into his hand.

IT was an hour later when fingers snapped before his face, and he came sharply awake. Honest Dan and Slim Dugan stood before him.

Lobo the Great was gone!

"Did you see that fighter of mine?" he demanded sharply.

"We saw him go out an hour ago. He just phoned from the depot. He said that you were in here, and that a snap of the fingers would awaken you."

A violent string of profanity left Sapper. Then he shoved his hand into his pocket.

His roll was gone!

"Yes, Sapper," Honest Dan said, "I shouldn't wonder. We found out what kind of a bird you had for a fighter. The colored boy he was playing dice with told us about the strange power he had. So we investigated."

"But," Sapper mumbled, mostly to himself, "those eyes—nobody could have got by those."

"Right," said Slim Dugan. "When it came to money! He even talked me out of your end of the purse before he left. Had me dizzy—and took it on the lam with the money. But when it comes to fighting, the eyes win—"

Sapper, with this last blow, sat down. "I don't get it," he groaned.

"You will," said Honest Dan. "Come here, Pete," he called.

The boy Lobo had fought came through the door.

"Look deep into his eyes," Dan instructed.

Sapper did as he was bid. Then he shrank back, utterly defeated. Honest Dan's boy's eyes told the story.

One eye looked to the east, and one to the west. No pair of straight eyes, no matter what their power, could ever concentrate on those eyes.

"That's all," Honest Dan said gently, as he laid a small package in Sappers hands. They went out and closed the door quietly behind them.

Sapper reached for his expensive silk handkerchief. But it, like his watch, his cuff links, his stickpin and money, was gone. He opened the parcel. It was the one he had handed to Slim Dugan as a present to Honest Dan earlier in the evening.

It contained a small towel, with crude lettering across it which read: "Crying towel."

And Sapper Mulligan used it!

# *THE RIVER DEMON*

A NOVEL OF WESTERN MINING

*W. D. Hoffman*

**Treacherously and murderously knifed, Old Pocket Daniels leaves his share of some important key claims to young Jim Hardy. With this transaction, Jim steps into one dangerous situation. Only his keen sense, his dauntless courage, and his killer strength stand by him. His friends—or those who should have been his friends—have already swelled the ranks of the odds against which he must fight.**

## CHAPTER I

### *On the Blacklist*

EAGERLY Jim Hardy approached the Monadnock Building in San Francisco. His step was elastic, his broad shoulders erect and back, his chin and eyes level. At last, after a long week's wait, he was to be granted an interview on his application for a boss job on one of the big dredges of the Belle Union. In Alaska they might blacklist him on an unjust charge of collusion with gold racketeers, but here in California he would at least get fair play.

His reflections on this score were terminated at the entrance of the building when he saw three men enter ahead of him. One of them looked like a typical old prospector from the hills. The other two resembled a pair of plug-uglies from the San Francisco waterfront, and from their manner Jim got the idea they were trailing the old-timer.

When the elderly miner inquired of the elevator starter the location of the Belle Union Dredging Company, the young Alaskan was doubly interested. Jim Hardy moved over to the lift behind the prospector. Here the evil-visaged pair hesitated, furtively glanced at Jim, then glided around the corridor out of sight.

"Those fellows following you, partner?" the Alaskan asked the prospector.

"Loike as not they was, lad," re-

plied the other, a ruddy-faced Irishman about sixty, his kindly, twinkling eyes contracting slightly. "This divil av a Belle Union is full av spies."

The elevator stopped for the sixth floor. Jim Hardy, still wondering about the old man's remark, was first to reach the door containing the Belle Union label and the legend "Office of the President." A sign-painter was engaged in scraping the lettering from the door. As Jim turned the knob he heard someone within say something about "key claims" and another made low comment about "that Irishman."

"Reception room's across the way, brother," the sign-painter told Jim, blocking his way. He motioned to the new lettering on a glass door, "Belle Union Consolidated." The change in the name surprised Jim.

Crossing the hall, the Alaskan entered the waiting room and announced his name and appointment to the girl at the desk. The old Irishman came in following Jim and was likewise told to wait.

An air of secrecy about the office of the dredging company struck Jim Hardy forcibly during the half-hour of waiting. There were mysterious goings and comings by shifty-eyed gentry who looked like gangsters or shanghai thugs fresh from the Embarcadero. These moved freely in and out of the office of the president without awaiting their turns, among them the two who had been following the old Irishman into the building. The impression grew that there was something quite decidedly off-color here. Jim noted also that the furtive gentry paid more attention to the veteran of the hills than the other three in the waiting room.

Moving over to the Irishman, the young dredge operator engaged him in friendly conversation. He liked the prospector's looks, and further was interested in the Mother Lode gold belt, on which renewed activity had been pronounced of late. Fifteen years had passed since Jim had prospected in the Sierra Nevada himself; he had always believed much gold remained along the Mother Lode.

The old-timer was a pocket-hunter, he told Jim, but fate had put him and his young partner on two river claims on the Big Bonanza, historic gold stream of the Sierra. "Goald is in the pockets, me lad," he affirmed, shaking his shaggy head. "Not in the worked-over gravel in the river. I don't fale aisy unless I'm pannin' the slopes av a ravine, workin' up stiddy and aisy, drawin' in the wedge by the color av the pan till I foind the nest av the pocket where the goald is roostin' at the grass-roots, me lad! Sure, that's the loife f'r Aul Pocket Daniels, and that's the raison I came here to sell me river claims. Out av a job, are ye, me lad?"

Jim nodded. Though for the moment among the unemployed, he had deposited fifteen hundred dollars in a San Francisco bank that morning, saved from his earnings as dredge boss in the north.

"In case ye don't land a job with the Belle Union, come up to the Big Bonanza and prospect f'r goald," Old Pocket Daniels suggested genially. He leaned over close to the young Alaskan. "'Tis a thavin' outfit, anyhow, this Belle Union. Tryin' to drive us little owners off av the river. A strappin' feller loike you should pan out two or thray dollars a day, in case ye need the money bad, me lad."

"Might do that," agreed Jim seriously. He had a conviction that there was more than three dollars a day to be had from the old gold streams if one knew his placers and the spots where gold was deposited after half a century of winter floods. But he would try to land a job as dredgeman first and keep his eyes open meanwhile for the kind of prospect that looked favorable.

At this juncture a petite young woman entered the waiting room and asked for her father.

"Go right in, Miss Fitzharg," the office secretary told her, with a smile.

The word "Fitzharg" startled Jim Hardy. It was not a common name, and the man who had been responsible for his leaving Alaska was Dan Fitzharg, general manager of the Tailrace Development Company. It was a coincidence, indeed, that two widely separated mining companies should have men in authority of the same unusual name.

"Yissir," Old Pocket Daniels continued, tapping his chair with his empty corncob pipe, "the Belle Union is a thavin' outfit, wantin' our claims f'r nawthin', threatenin' to float the dredge down onto our property whether we sell or no. 'Tis the trust, beloike. Mergers an' mergers—everywhere. The trust has gobbled up the Belle Union. This Fitzharg is a divil if iver there was wan—"

"Mr. Hardy, you may go in now," the girl at the desk announced.

Jim rose. As he entered the office, the one addressed as Miss Fitzharg was leaving, and each took passing note of the other. The girl was pretty, and the Alaskan was a young man of arresting physique and more than ordinary good looks.

The man seated behind the glistening mahogany desk was not Fitzharg, but a thin-lipped, sallow-faced executive of fifty, W. C. Bayliss, Belle Union president, for whom young Hardy had waited in San Francisco for an appointment. He did not look up immediately, but kept his gaze glued to some papers.

Presently he raised a pair of cold blue eyes on the Alaskan. "The Skagway Kid," he murmured, staring intently, watching the effect of the words. "Jim Hardy, the Skagway Kid?"

Jim nodded, standing before the desk. He was a little puzzled at the dredging official's manner. "Eight years ago they billed me under that name for a couple of wrestling matches in Skagway," he informed. "Anything to draw a crowd. I was a kid then and didn't mind," he added with a grin.

"Humph! Your application is for boss dredgeman or assistant?"

"You've got my letter, stating qualifications, Mr. Bayliss," the Alaskan replied.

"I've got it." The executive smiled sourly. "You were with Tailrace Development. Have you got a letter of recommendation from the company?" he questioned.

"No sir."

"Why not?"

"I was discharged, through a misunderstanding."

Bayliss frowned. "It will be news to you, Hardy, that Tailrace and Belle Union have consolidated. That's how we happen to have a full report on the $40,000 gold robbery on the Tailrace dredge." He thumbed a letter from among the stack on the desk. "And you've got the nerve to come here to ask for a job when we know your record up there? You are on the blacklist of every dredge outfit in California as well as Alaska, Hardy." He pressed a buzzer on his desk.

The veins in the Alaskan's temples stood out and his pulse throbbed. He knew now what the man was driving at. Honest to his fingertips, Jim Hardy had been fired, disgraced, leaving his job as dredge superintendent in the north under a cloud. That was on the day following the appearance of the Highgraders, notorious gang of former "hardrock" thieves who had turned dredge robbers. The gold racketeers had cleaned out the Tailrace dredge while the plant was dark one night. Looking for a victim, the company had discharged young Hardy, and though Jim had knocked General Manager Dan Fitzharg down when the latter had hinted that Jim had been bribed by the robbers, that did not remove the stigma of the charge.

Before the Alaskan could reply to the insinuation, a large man of about forty in high lace boots, whipcord

trousers and checkered shirt stepped into the office from a side room. Jim recognized his old enemy, Dan Fitzharg.

His presence here was not so surprising to Jim now, owing to the consolidation of the companies. But Fitzharg's first words told that he had another reason for coming to California:

"Didn't expect to find me here, did you, Hardy?" he asked brusquely. "Fortunately for the Belle Union, I've blocked your game. Followed you on the next boat. It happens I learned the Highgraders were transferring their operations to the Big Bonanza field." His piercing gray eyes narrowed. "I had an idea you'd try another inside job, Hardy."

Angrily Jim Hardy advanced upon the mine official. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded, his fingers doubling into fists at his sides.

"I mean you've verified my suspicions that the Highgraders have designs on the Belle Union," gritted Fitzharg, holding himself erect in front of the young Alaskan. "Get out!"

Fury blazed in the blue eyes of Hardy. Again he was tempted to knock his unjust accuser down. But he saw that little was to be gained by losing his temper; besides, Dan Fitzharg, though a powerful man, was considerably older than Jim and hardly a fair physical antagonist.

"I need no invitation to get out," he replied incisively. "Since this consolidation, I wouldn't take the presidency of the Belle Union, if offered. But before I go, I'll say your insinuations are a lie, and you know it."

Fitzharg smiled ironically. "It was a coincidence, of course, that you were found on the Tailrace dredge at midnight, last of the Highgraders to leave—when your job as boss always kept you on the plant in daytime only. It was another coincidence that both guards had disappeared, too, I suppose. You didn't order them off, of course."

Again Jim's blood was boiling, but with an effort he controlled himself. "I made a statement of what happened that night to President Fetterman of the Tailrace," he said steadily —"how I was attracted by moving flashlights on the dredge at midnight, how I crossed the river and went up the gangway, arriving on the boat as the mob slipped down the bow landing with the loot. Before I could get around to the other end of the dredge you appeared, and you know what happened."

"I remember it very well," affirmed Fitzharg, his eyes snapping. "When I caught you red-handed, you jumped me. I'm the kind of man that never forgets. You floored me once—you'll never do it again. You proved your guilty connection with the robbery when you attacked me instead of trying to halt the thieves—"

"Careful what you say, Fitzharg." The fighting jaw of the Alaskan bulged, his neck sinews taut, as he moved upon his accuser. At that moment President Bayliss shoved a black automatic pistol onto the desk top.

"None of that, Hardy!" he snapped. "One hostile move and I'll summon the police."

"Call 'em. Do it right now," challenged the young dredgeman angrily. "You didn't call the police in Tailrace, Fitzharg—didn't even prefer any charge, knowing blamed well you had no case."

"I drove you out of Alaska," bit out the stalwart mining man.

"No, I went out of my own accord," Jim replied grimly. He might have told Fitzharg that he had actually come to California on the trail of the Highgrader gang with the determination of running down the gold racketeers, not so much to recover the stolen amalgam of the dredge company as to vindicate himself. He, too, had heard rumors that the gang was headed for the Big Bonanza,

which was the chief reason Jim wanted to locate on a Belle Union dredge on that river.

Voices in the adjoining room came faintly to Jim Hardy's ears. Someone was talking again about "key claims;" also the words, "that Irishman," were repeated. Dan Fitzharg's loud, crisp tones drowned out the voices in the other room:

"Get this, Hardy! I knew your game the minute you took the boat for California." His gray eyes contracted to sharp pin points of granite. "The whole Highgrader gang headed down here for the Big Bonanza River. It was a cinch you'd try to land a job on a Belle Union dredge. Now, get this! I drove you out of Alaska, and before I get through I'll drive you out of California!"

For once Jim Hardy found no adequate words for utterance. He knew how idle would be any atempt to use argument with Dan Fitzharg, anyway. In the northland under the rough raw code of the gold fields, Jim would have hurled himself upon his accuser—had done it once. Here it would have brought the police, landed the Alaskan in jail in San Francisco, and indefinitely delayed his program to follow the Highgraders to Big Bonanza River, if not as a dredgeman, then as a free lance prospector.

"Get out!" snapped Fitzharg belligerently. "If I ever run across you again within ten miles of a Belle Union dredge, I'll prefer charges that will land you in the penitentiary!"

Jim Hardy went out, but he paused at the office door long enough to utter a chill warning and a prophecy:

"Don't ever prefer a charge against me that you can't make stick, Fitzharg. We might meet again, because I intend to prospect the Big Bonanza. Before this thing is over with, you'll come begging to me, *on your knees.*"

He closed the door and walked over to Old Pocket Daniels. "I'll be seeing you downstairs, partner," he remarked with a smile. "Don't let that bunch of highbinders do you out of your claim."

He waited out on Market Street for the old-timer, who arrived in less than fifteen minutes. "Begorra, me lad, they're a band av thaves," Daniels affirmed. "Wanted me two claims for half av their value, which I made raisonable at a thousand apace, but which they rayfused."

The old pocket-hunter was going back to the Big Bonanza, and Jim was eager to go with him. "I'll look over your claims, and maybe we can make a cash deal," the Alaskan told him.

"I've got a young lad av a pardner," Daniels confided on the ferryboat crossing San Francisco Bay. "We've been takin' out jist a couple av dollars a day, and I wouldn't decave ye about the property. But for some raison the company wants our two claims right bad, without payin' the price. Ye kin outfit in Sacryminto, me lad—look around a spell for yerself up and down the river, and if ye want a third interest in the two claims, it's yours for seven hundred dollars."

He confided further that only the mysterious killing of Grizzly Tom, another old prospector on those two claims, had put him into possession of the property; otherwise he would have continued hunting pockets. "I belave the thavin' River Damon murdered Auld Tom," he affirmed.

"Who's the River Demon?" Jim wanted to know.

"'Tis the name the lads on the Big Bonanza give to the Belle Union dredge," Daniels explained. "Auld Tom was knoifed while he slept. I rached his side before he died, and he gave his claims to me."

The ferry boat eased into the pile-lined Oakland slip, tied to the landing and the aprons were lowered. Filing down with the surging crowd into the train-shed, the two gold hunters made for the northbound train.

Old Pocket Daniels was ahead of the Alaskan, and in the rush was

jostled farther forward. At this juncture Jim Hardy saw his new-found friend raise his arms wildly, stagger, and then point to a man running through the crowd. "Ketch that divil!" he gasped, turning a tense, woe-stricken face.

Jim's first thought was that the man was a pickpocket. He elbowed forward through the crowd, but by that time the fellow was lost in the throng that was rushing between the train aisleways. Turning, the Alaskan saw that Pocket Daniels had fallen to the floor of the station. Several passengers stopped to render aid, but the main tidal wave of humans swept onward around him.

In a moment Jim was at his side. The old-timer's flannel shirt was stained with crimson and under him a pool of blood was gathering.

"Th' River Damon, lad," the prospector said huskily, as Jim stooped beside him. "Knoifed me in th' back. Plase get me a bit av paper to write on," he begged, suppressing a groan.

The first two trains were beginning to move. Above the din of hissing compressors, electric motors and rumbling wheels the Alaskan shouted to an approaching uniformed station man to halt the trains, summon a doctor and police. But it was too late; the assassin had chosen the time and setting for his deed well. Even Jim had gotten only a fleeting glimpse of his back; probably no eye had seen the knife thrust in that surging mass of hurrying commuters. Three trains had got underway before the signal came to hold the others. Two special officers of ferry and railroad system were at the scene quickly; they called others, also an ambulance, sought witnesses in vain, took steps to have the three trains met and searched at their first stops.

In the next ten minutes, while the depot nurse rendered first aid, the dying man with frontier stoicism scribbled a half-interest gift deed to two Grizzly Bar claims to one Bessie Russell and Jim Hardy, with the officers witnessing his signature.

In a steady voice he explained to Jim that the girl was his niece; he wanted Jim to have an equal interest with her so that he would be on the property and protect her rights and those of his boy partner against the River Demon. "The Damon has killed me, lad, thinkin' it wud be aisy thin to take the property from Yuba George, the lad that's my pardner. Protict him, frind—him and me niece —she lives in Sacryminto, I belave."

"I'll do it, pard," the Alaskan assured him grimly. "But we'll make it a straight purchase. I'll pay your niece a thousand dollars for the part interest in your share." With tender warmth he gripped the prospector's hand. He saw Old Pocket Daniels' kindly eyes grow vacant and relax in death a moment after Jim had made the promise, before the arrival of the ambulance.

## CHAPTER II

### *Hungry Ground*

REMAINING in the bay district long enough to attend the inquest and the subsequent burial, the Alaskan gave the police what meager information he had about the eagerness of Belle Union Consolidated to possess the old gold digger's "key" claims, about the two thugs who had trailed the prospector into the Monadnock Building, and about the direct charge of Pocket Daniels that the River Demon had knifed him, a fate that was identical with that suffered by Daniels' friend, Grizzly Tom, once owner of the same claims.

Rather than being grateful for this lead, Captain French of the homicide squad was abusive to Jim himself, remarking truculently that he had backtrailed the murder victim to the Belle Union office and had talked to Bayliss, in whom he had great confidence; also that he had learned why the Skagway Kid had left Alaska. Jim

told a straightforward story of events there, to which the captain listened with a poker face. But the police made no effort to hold the Alaskan further, showing neither Bayliss nor Fitzharg had dared prefer a formal charge against him.

Acting as his own detective, Jim spent most of two days watching the office of the Belle Union in the hope that the two plug-uglies would put in an appearance, in which case he resolved he would beat them into a pulp if need be to force the truth out of them. But in that period they did not show up, and the Alaskan decided that he had better hurry to the Big Bonanza to find Daniels' little partner before something happened to him there. Also, he had a hunch the assassins might have jumped to the scene of the Belle Union mining operations, as a favorable hide-out.

Sacramento was on his way. He was unable to find Pocket Daniels' niece, but located a relative who said that the Russell girl, an orphan of sixteen, had gone camping with a crowd of young people in the High Sierra. Outfitting as a prospector, Jim headed northeast into the foothills for Big Bonanza River.

Arriving on the second afternoon in the diggings of the historic old gold stream, Jim found little groups of prospectors at work at many places on the stream, but none of these knew the location of Grizzly Bar, from which the Alaskan concluded the name was a local one, recently given, perhaps in honor of the slain Grizzly Tom. A dredge, he learned, was at work twelve miles upriver.

It was noon of next day when he looked down from a high canyon wall onto a scene of great activity. Again the wilderness was alive with gold seekers, men recruited from the ranks of the unemployed of the large coast cities. A far cry from the days of the forty-niners, flivver power was lifting the sand at places; even a radio was echoing from a nearby tent.

As he traveled along the cliff he heard the familiar rumble of a dredge. Soon he could see the big boat, its great upthrust gantries reaching out like arms to the clear Sierra sky, its swinging, buckling ladder revolving with its buckets that gnawed deep into the gravel of the river.

He wondered if this could be Grizzly Bar under him. More gold diggers were located here than he had yet seen on the river. They were a motley crew, lured here to fight the chill waters for a few cents to a dollar a day where the forty-niners had sluiced out millions. Only a dredge could mine the leavings from the early days with any considerable profit at most places on the stream. White collar men were here, clerks and office help out of employment, blanket stiffs, panhandlers, hot-dog vendors, riffraff and honest men, some with wives and families helping with the gravel washing.

Two things out of the ordinary caught the Alaskan's eye almost at the same instant. Looking down from the cliff, he saw a khaki-clad youth hanging in midair in the canyon, high over the mountain river. The other object was the barrel of a rifle, thrust outward from the canyon wall below Jim Hardy. The gun was pointed downward toward the stream.

Jim saw in a moment that the boy was held up in his unusual position by a cable that had been fastened to the two walls of the gorge. Attached to the wire line, a rope and pulley carried what resembled an old automobile seat that had been rigged up to hold the weight of the little fellow, who had straddled it and swung clear of the river bank. The crude contraption evidently was used to spare the young miner a wetting in the cold waters in returning to his tent or cabin on the opposite bank.

Using a pull rope, the boy operator began to draw himself out over the water, until it seemed he must be thirty feet above the current.

Here the floating youngster halted almost in midstream, and now he took up what looked like a large colored box. Almost immediately the melodious strains of an accordion were wafted up the mountainsides. The lad played several airs on his aerial perch, then pulled himself farther over the river.

Following the direction of the hidden rifleman's apparent aim, the Alaskan was astonished at seeing the weapon swing over toward the boy on the cable.

It was impossible for Jim Hardy to get down to the ledge where the skulker was hiding without making a detour around the slope. He picked up a piece of rock, prepared to hurl it at the narrow barrel of the weapon, a difficult target. At this moment he saw a red-bearded man shove his head and shoulders out of the jumble of rocks below him.

The rifle was at his shoulder, and the fellow's cheek was low at the side of the stock while he found the sights. The gun was still directed at the boy on the cable.

"Hey, you!" cried out Jim sharply, on the verge of hurling the rock.

The words had a startling effect. The skulker jumped into the manzanita bushes below him like a jackrabbit, without even looking up. So ludicrous was the figure he cut that Jim grinned. His face sobered quickly, however. Only one with guilty intentions would have got under cover with such reckless speed.

Meanwhile the boy riding the cable carrier was taking his time, as though enjoying his home-made conveyor. With the unknown marauder still hiding among the brush, there was nothing to prevent him carrying out his purpose at any moment, in spite of the interruption from above. Jim decided to go back up the slope far enough to get around the ledge near which the rifleman had hidden.

As he traveled upward he got a better view of the bend of the river. This must be Grizzly Bar, as described by the slain prospector. If so, the location of the Daniels claims was a good one, the best so far noticed by the Alaskan on the Big Bonanza. In the many years since the Argonauts had taken out gold here the winter floods of the Sierra would bring down a lot of fresh dust and nuggets from the rotted veins of the Mother Lode, and in places like this the gold would find a resting place.

Again the strains of the boy's accordion rose in the canyon. Other river rats were leaving their diggings farther down, as though the music were luring them. This Jim saw was not the case when the crowd began to congregate near the bend. It was a miners' meeting of some kind.

Working his way down nearer to the ledge where the rifleman had dropped from sight, Jim noticed the antics of the boy on the suspended old auto seat. Waving his hands, the lad was twisting the carrier so that it twirled on the rope that held it to the cable, while he swam about like a spider. He would have a grandstand seat to watch the gathering of miners below.

"Kid's got a wonderful location there if he only knew it," the Alaskan told himself. "Ought to be a regular gold trap on that bedrock under the slow water. Sluggish current, almost a pond over that sandbar. If that's Grizzly Bar it might be that kid is Old Pocket's partner, the one he called Yuba George!"

He had got around to the ledge at last, and for the moment he gave chief attention to his hunt for the skulker who had aimed the rifle. Circling the ledge, he searched in all directions, but without success. The marauder had slipped away.

Someone was speaking down on the river bank, his words drifting up clearly to the Alaskan:

"It's up to you, gentlemen. I've called you together to make an offer. I don't believe you're averaging a dol-

lar a day on these worked-out, hungry claims. As field superintendent of the Belle Union Consolidated, I'm authorized to offer you five hundred apiece for your claims."

There were guffaws of derision. Jim Hardy moved closer to the edge of the overhanging rock, where he saw a crowd of about thirty men in a circle. Standing in the middle of the throng was the tall, large-framed Dan Fitzharg.

"Don't kid us, Fitzharg," retorted one of the group. "If this ground is good enough for the dredging company, it's good enough for us. We won't talk business under a thousand apiéce."

"What? For this worked-out gravel? This is all hungry ground. Take five hundred or leave it," the superintendent retorted brusquely. "You don't have a chance. Under the navigation laws, we can float the dredge through here. You river rats can't block us. And we'd do a lot of damage coming through. Where would your sluices be? And those wing-dams you've started to build? We'd knock them to pieces."

"That so?" scoffed one of the little army of claim-owners. "If you bring the River Demon through here and damage our property, we'll go to law over it. Our claims are legally recorded."

Fitzharg laughed. "Don't be funny, gentlemen. Where would you be in fighting the millions of the Belle Union through the courts? Why, we'd tie the thing up in litigation for ten years. And we'd be in possession. You can't stop a dredge. We can float the big boat past here inside of twenty-four hours. Our claims downriver would justify such a move, in the eyes of the law."

"You can't scare us, Fitzharg," the spokesman of the miners retorted. "Your offer is refused."

"Think it over, gentlemen," the dredge company man remarked, turning to leave. "Send me word within two hours if you change your minds."

The crowd gradually broke up into smaller groups, discussing matters in angry tones. As the river rats moved away to work their claims, Jim Hardy started to go back to his burro in the chaparral. "It's plain enough why Pocket Daniels called the Belle Union a thieving outfit," he told himself.

Moving up among the talus boulders and brush, he whirled quickly at the crack of a rifle. The report had sounded from the rocks to the right of him, seventy or eighty yards away. At the same moment he saw the contraption carrying the little gold digger fall through space, its human cargo with it. Boy and conveyor plunged thirty feet to the stream. There was a high splash of white water, and the youngster was struggling with the current. . . .

## CHAPTER III

### *News of a Strike*

BREAKING through a clump of manzanita brush to a large boulder, Jim Hardy saw a movement in the chaparral to the right and below him, enough to tell that the attacker was hurrying to get away. With no other weapon available, the Alaskan snatched up a broken piece of rock and hurled it downward, just ahead of the spot where the bushes had moved.

From the sudden lurch in the brush he believed he had scored a hit, but he did not pause longer to give attention to the skulker just now. Slipping down across the face of the boulder, he jumped to another and scrambled over the jumble of granite talus to reach the less steep portion of the hillside.

He saw that the current was carrying the victim of the attack around the turn of the river, past a spur of the mountain that shut off help from those who had returned to their claims. Work had abruptly halted in the diggings at sound of the shot,

and miners were running toward the spot where the cable spanned the gorge, but these could not get to the struggling boy on account of the precipice just under the Alaskan.

Striking for the lower side of the rock wall, Jim hoped to head off the little miner as the current carried him down. As he reached the old brush-grown road fifty yards from the river, a man stepped out abruptly in front of him. A double-barreled shotgun was directed at the runner.

"Where's the fire, stranger?" the armed one drawled sourly.

Jim saw that he was not the red-bearded individual who had fired the shot at the boy. Forbidding in appearance, the man was flat-nosed, watery-eyed and sullen, his mouth twisted down at both corners under a sparse mustache. The raising of both arms with the shotgun had pulled back an open vest, revealing a cheap nickled badge that had the name "Union Belle" on it.

"Boy drowning down there! Out of my way!"

"He'll swim. Halt!" The fellow put the shotgun to his shoulder, the twin bores directed at the Alaskan's head. "Ca'm down, ca'm down, stranger." His lips moved jerkily behind the weapon. "It was claim-jumpers that shot him off the cable. Belle Union has a deal on for that property. Somebody's goin' to take it from the kid, and the Belle is goin' to protect its rights."

"Put down that gun!" roared the Alaskan, fury in his eyes.

"I believe you're one of the claim-jumpers yourself. Halt right where you are!" snarled the dredge company guard. "If I have to shoot, I'll do it—!"

The sentence ended in a high-pitched yelp. Instead of obeying the command to halt, Jim had continued to advance toward the leveled weapon, and then with sudden tigerish impulse he had jumped for the shotgun, his husky hands seizing the barrel. With a tremendous wrench he ripped the weapon from the fingers of the mine guard. Now he swung it at the fellow's head and knocked him sprawling into the bushes.

He had acted thus summarily because he knew there was no time for argument. From what the belligerent guard had said, Jim believed if there was any claim-jumping done, the Belle Union had a hand in it. Running for the river, the Alaskan hurled the confiscated shotgun into the stream as he neared the bank two hundred feet below the point where the lad had been catapulted into the water.

Jim breathed in relief when he saw that the victim of the attack was still afloat. Striking out into the river to head him off, the Alaskan yelled to him to take it easy. Three miners in a rowboat were now rounding the precipice, but Jim was nearest at hand. The boy's accordion floated near the shore, and Jim was able to pick it out of the water and toss it to the sandy bank.

He worked his way to the middle of the stream on foot, finding the water less than the depth of his shoulders at this point. By this time the three men in the boat were arriving on the scene, and other gold diggers were crowding at the edge of the precipice, helpless to lend a hand, their excited shouts resounding through the gorge. One of the men in the boat snatched the auto seat tram from the water just as the floundering victim drifted into the Alaskan's arms.

Holding him head and shoulders out of water to allow the gasping youth to get his breath, Jim noted that he was a chubby-faced boy of about sixteen. "Bullet didn't hit you, did it, pardner?" he asked the lad, starting to carry him ashore.

"N-no!" panted the youth, his teeth chattering. When safely on the sandy bank he declared he would have drowned but for Jim's act. The frigid water, fed from the mountain snows,

combined with his clothing and the shock of the high drop from the cable, had made him too weak to swim out of the current, sluggish as it was.

The miners landed the boat and crowded about the pair. "It's little Yuba George," said one. "Didn't I tell you he'd come to harm while his pardner was away? Old Pocket ought to have knowed better than leave him, with the River Demon thugs tryin' to muscle in on his claims!"

"I sure thank you, mister, for getting me out," the lad declared, blinking at the Alaskan. "That fellow didn't really try to hit me, I guess," he added, with a grin at the group about him. "All he wanted to do was to scare me off this claim while Old Pocket was away on business."

A bewhiskered old miner shook his dead. "It's more'n that, son, more'n that. The River Demon is a-cravin' your claim, son. Not that there's any great amount of gold on it, you understand—but the dredge company is blocked if you don't sell out. These is key claims you and your pard owns, son—key claims."

"You're always saying that, Uncle Jack," smiled the youngster. "But they would hardly shoot me."

"Why, son, wasn't Old Pocket's first pardner, Grizzly Tom, knifed to death right on this claim? 'Twasn't such a mystery, that killin', son, if you got right down to the facts, I'm a-thinkin'!"

"Look after him, boys," broke in Jim Hardy, satisfied that the little fellow was not badly hurt. "I'll take a look up there to see if I can find the cuss who fired that shot." With this he started back up the slope.

From what the gold diggers had said it was plain they had not yet been informed of the murder of Old Pocket Daniels in the ferry trainshed. In his eagerness to find the attacker on the mountainside, Jim had not waited to reveal it; and further he did not care to add to the fright of the little partner of Daniels so soon after this latest bit of terrorism.

Climbing to the point where he had left his burro, he obtained his own rifle from his pack, and then hurried through the manzanita and rock to the spot where the attacker had discharged his weapon. In his haste to get away, the fellow had left a distinct trail for fifty feet in the dirt and in the broken-down brush on his pathway. Then he had climbed over some boulders, leaving no tracks.

On the chance of encountering the red-bearded man somewhere on the mountainside, Jim continued his search. Five minutes later, in parting the bushes on a gravelly incline of the slope, he came upon a scene that made him smile. It was the last place in the world he expected to find a dainty young woman with her shoes off. Attired neatly in a white sports dress, she was sitting on a rock shaking the gravel from her low-cut pumps. When she lifted her face Jim got a double surprise. She was the girl he had seen in the office of the Belle Union in San Francisco—Dan Fitzharg's daughter.

She looked straight past the Alaskan, as though he were an inconsequential part of the landscape, unhurriedly replaced her shoes, and moved her feet off the narrow deer trail so that Jim might get past between two rocks.

Jim ignored her as he walked by, though he knew that any two people who met in such an isolated location would ordinarily offer greetings. It was up to her to speak first if there were to be any exchanges; he certainly was not going to put himself in position to be rebuffed by any Fitzharg.

"Does this path lead down to the river?" she asked abruptly as he got past her.

"It's a deer trail," he informed, turning. "Pretty steep. Can I help you?" he asked politely.

"Thanks, no." She looked at him

keenly a moment, then rose and stepped to the incline and down, heedless of the gravel that was refilling her shoes. Continuing around among the manzanita bushes, she was lost to sight among the boulders.

The Alaskan shrugged. He wondered whether by any chance her father had spoken of Jim Hardy and whether she recognized him as the one who had been in the Belle Union office in San Francisco that morning.

Proceeding up the slope toward his burro, he had not gone far when he heard her call for help. He was a little suspicious. Some girls employed that ruse when away from civilization; it was like dropping a handkerchief in polite society. But he started down the slope to see. Again he heard her call "Help!" and knew he was the one she was hailing.

Going in the direction of the call to the right of the deer trail, he was forced to detour around an overhanging rock. There he saw her clinging to the canyon wall, holding to the root of a manzanita that threatened to break loose at any moment, her high-heeled shoes digging into the granite surface.

She seemed tense with fright, and when she turned her head Jim saw her face was white as chalk. In a position where she could not go up on account of the ledge above her, she was unable to retreat downward also. If she slipped, she would go over a hundred-foot wall to the rocks below.

"Hold on a minute!" Jim called out, running up the slope to the left of her and traveling like a cat to get around to the top of the ledge. Soon he arrived on the overhanging rock.

Lying flat on the shelf, he saw that he could not quite reach her. He took his rifle in both hands and held it down, with the grip toward her.

"Grab it," he directed. "And don't let go!"

She released one hand from the root, then the other, grasping the butt end of the gun with bloodless fingers. Jim pulled up the rifle hand over hand, then seized her wrists. In doing so he dropped the rifle over the cliff. In another moment she was pulled up on top of the shelf.

"Got yourself in a tight fix, didn't you, sister?" the Alaskan asked, with a grin, noting that her eyes were hazel, large and intelligent.

"Thanks," she said airily, trying to hide the terror that had gripped her. "Your rescuing day? I saw you pull out the river rat down there." She laughed, fished out her powder puff from the bag she had held over her forearm while being lifted to the cliff, and patted her saucy nose.

"You don't look like a gold digger," declared Jim quizzically.

Her eyes twinkled. "I thought I was a goat. That was my pater talking to the river rats down there. Boy, I got a scare. It's my treat."

"Then I'm in luck, Miss Fitzharg."

She stared at him. "I tried to place you. Now I know—in the Belle Union office that morning. But somehow I don't seem to recall the name!"

"Jim Hardy." He watched the effect of the words on her. But if the name meant anything, she did not show it.

"One of our new men?" she asked.

"No, a prospector. Belle Union and I didn't hit it exactly."

She puckered her lips. "Out of a job? I might get you on the dredge. I'll ask dad—he'll be on pins and needles wondering where I've gone. You might come along," she suggested, as though the idea just occurred.

"Not just now." He saw that she had no knowledge of the feud between her parent and himself and he was not exactly eager to have her know. "I've had enough of dredging," he added. "Hope to make more at prospecting."

"You're right," she declared with enthusiasm, a sudden flashing light in her eyes. "I have a notion to let you in on a secret that would make your curly hair stand on end."

"Don't do it," he warned gravely.

"There's going to be a big rush in these diggings," she whispered, looking about her." You'd better stake as many claims down there on Grizzly Bar as you can! It's my treat, and now I've told you. I must go now, or dad will be organizing a search."

"Kidding me?"

"No. Listen, Jim! Claim-jumpers shot at that boy. The sandbar is rich in gold. I overheard it from Super Bill on the dredge. Those river rats don't know it themselves yet—only two of them, rather, fellows named Derat and Binnard. They took fifteen thousand dollars in gold to the San Francisco Mint two days ago. Now we're even. Good luck to your gold pan!"

Waving her hand, she ran down the slope to the right toward the river, while Jim Hardy stared after her wonderingly.

She was a queer person, a little flippant and decidedly modern. Addressed him as "Jim" like an old friend. Yet he thought her charming. She had not been in Alaska with her father, or he would have known it. Probably he would not see her again, as she was undoubtedly up here only on a visit. If she remained for any length of time it would be a sort of sly revenge on Dan Fitzharg to make a friend of her.

There was no doubt she believed the tale about the two river rats and their big strike. Maybe she was right; the information had come hot off the Belle Union dredge. If the company had learned about the strike, it would explain the attack on Yuba George as well as the murder of Pocket Daniels. Unwittingly she had convinced the Alaskan further of the high-handed methods of her father and the Belle Union in dealing with the little claim-owners.

As the girl disappeared in the chaparral, Jim started down off the rock shelf to hunt his fallen rifle. The bend of the river was just below him here. He would have gambled the new rich strike, if real, had been made on the short turn of the river, where gold was always deposited in greatest quantity. Derat and Binnard must be located. there near Yuba George.

Hunting among the bushes where the gun had fallen, the Alaskan located it without great difficulty. Fortunately it had hit the branches of a scrub oak on the descent and was little damaged.

He whirled quickly in the act of picking the rifle out of a wedgelike crack between two great roundheads. A gruff command sounded from above:

"Drop that gun, Skagway!"

The Alaskan leaped down into the wide fissure among the rocks, out of sight of the shelf from which the strange voice had come. Two sharp reports followed, and bits of granite flew off the boulder near Jim's head.

It was not the threat and succeeding gunfire that roused Jim so much as the form of address. No one outside Alaska except Fitzharg and Bayliss of the Belle Union knew him by that name "Skagway," he believed. Not even the members of the High-grader racketeers knew his eight-year-old record as a wrestler, so far as he was aware.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Bullion Baker*

WIGGLING deeper into the rock crevasse, he wormed his way around the largest of the two boulders until he was on the side opposite which he had dropped from view. Here he raised his rifle cautiously at the edge of the granite surface, covering the shelf above.

With the weapon advanced, he slipped up through the brush to command a fuller view of the overhanging rock. When he got above the spot he saw that the man who had challenged him had gone.

For a time he hunted the fellow, wondering if he might be the red-bearded attacker of Yuba George. That word "Skagway" still rang in his ears. He recalled distinctly that the man who had uttered it almost choked on the last syllable, as though the word had slipped out impulsively before the speaker thought of what he was saying.

For more than a half-hour Jim hunted for the attacker in vain. It was certain that someone from either Tailrace Valley of Skagway had blundered onto him in the Sierra wilds. Bayliss would not be here nor would Dan Fitzharg be scouting around thus on the mountainside. The conclusion was that either Fitzharg had brought someone with him from Alaska who happened to know Jim or else one of the Highgrader gang familiar with Jim's past had done the firing. Sooner or later Jim Hardy would run into the man who had recognized him.

A short time later the Alaskan had another encounter with a dredge company guard that further verified his suspicion that the Belle Union was a claim-jumping outfit. Knowing a secret strike such as Fitzharg's daughter had revealed would mean evidences of gold in less degree at other small turns in the stream, Jim had gone above Grizzly Bar to make a preliminary test. Picking a turn of the river that looked promising, he emerged from the manzanita brush with his burro. With the gold pan from the pack in hand, he walked to the edge of the stream.

As he was about to scoop up a panful of sand from the slow waters of the bend, a voice hailed him from the opposite bank:

"Get alang there, bo'! This is Belle Union ground. Claims owned by the company all around here!"

Looking up, the Alaskan saw an armed guard rising from the chaparral, a Winchester in hand. What interested him most was the fact that the big challenger wore a red beard.

"Don't see it signed, bo'," returned Jim, in the same form of address.

"I'm the sign. That's what the company pays me for. Get away from that water!"

"Good enough," agreed Jim, having due regard for legal ownership under the mining laws. "How far down do your claims extend?"

"'Bout a mile. There's plenty of river rats down there workin' for two-bits a day. Maybe you can edge in there." A leering grin was on the red-bearded countenance of the guard. "Get going!" he added, threatening. "Get going—before I run you in for trespassing!"

Jim Hardy rose to his full height of six-feet two, his gold pan still dry in his hand. He did not like the guard's virulent manner, but the fellow was armed and doubtless within his rights, technically.

Jim was not moving fast enough for the dredge company employee, who started to cross the river on boulders that had been rolled into the shallows for stepping stones. In his haste, his boots slipped off one of the smooth rocks and he went into the water backwards, clutching at his rifle and cutting a ludicrous figure, losing his hat. The young Alaskan grinned, and as the guard floundered toward the next boulder, and crawled upon it, his face was dark with wrath. He got to his feet, shook the water out of his hair and reddish beard, then jumped to the next stone. In a moment he was across and walking toward Jim Hardy.

When within six feet he suddenly halted. The glare of rage in his pinkish eyes became a stare of astonishment and recognition.

"The Skagway Kid!" he muttered. "I haven't seen you for eight years, since you rassled Happy Farrington."

"Bullion Baker," murmured Jim, in mutual recognition in spite of the beard that now adorned the other's countenance. From a clean-shaven, sporty gamekeeper, Baker had changed

much in appearance, including his rough apparel. Proprietor of a dance hall and gambling palace, Bullion Baker was reputed to be rich while in the north, a man of few scruples and fewer virtues. Jim had never been intimate with the gamekeeper, but once had snatched a pistol from his hand during a melee in which Baker was about to slay a drunken man.

His surprise at meeting Jim here was genuine enough, and for that reason he could not have been the one who had called out to "Skagway" to drop the gun and then opened fire. But he certainly was the individual who had shot the little gold seeker off the cable tram.

The dredge company guard eyed Jim Hardy suspiciously, his gaze shifting to the burro and back to his old acquaintance. "A prospector," he grunted. "On your uppers, heh, Skagway? Thought you had high and mighty ideas of being a correspondence school mining engineer? I'm not the only one that's been in hard luck, looks like, but I haven't yet had to be a river rat."

"Prefer to pack a gun for the company and take a shot at kids from ambush?" the Alaskan asked pointedly.

The other's jaw fell, and for an instant there was panic in his eyes. But he recovered quickly, a deep frown creasing his forehead. "What do you mean?" he shot back angrily.

"You know what I mean, Bullion. I see you've got a fresh cut alongside the ear. I threw the rock that hit you, from the ledge right above where you were hiding."

Bullion Baker perceived further denial would be useless. "You know a hell of a lot, don't you, Skagway?" he grunted, with a shrug. "Well, I got my orders. We're hazing the rats to make 'em lay off company ground. Of course, I didn't try to hit that kid—only clipped the rope over his head. Him and his pardner has got that cable tied up on company property on the north side of the river."

This was pretty thin, but Jim Hardy was willing to let it rest at that for the time being. "Hazing the river rats?" he queried innocently. "I'd figured on joining that crowd down there myself."

"Humph. Ain't located yet, eh? Better stay off Grizzly Bar, Skagway."

"Yeah?"

"Company's going through them claims down here. Keep that under your hat, Skagway. Them that don't do business with the Belle Union are going to lose out."

Jim looked puzzled. "Prospectors have located under the mining laws, haven't they?"

"Prospectors? Bah! Blanket-stiffs and hitch-hikers and such guys is what they are. River rats are blocking the channel with their danged sluices and traps, wing-damming here and there, and that's what makes the company sore. Take a squint upriver. See them two trucks?"

The Alaskan nodded slowly. He could see the huge wire spools and other electrical equipment on the vehicles near the scene of the dredging.

"They're stringing the wires now—to fetch the power down towards Grizzly Bar to operate the dredge," enlightened the guard.

Jim understood. Fitzharg had already arranged to bring the giant digger through, even before he had tried to force the claim-owners into making the deal for their property.

"By the way, Bullion," he asked, changing the subject, "any other boys from the north working for this dredging outfit?"

"Wisenheimer's down here. Got one of them hungry claims. He's the only one from Alaska I've heard was here. Dan Fitzharg brought me along for this guard job, but Wisey, he came on his own."

Jim doubted that Baker was telling the truth about knowing no other Alaskan in these parts, since the man

who had challenged Jim as Skagway was certainly from the north, and he was not Wisenheimer, who talked with a distinct German accent. A good-natured young Teuton but a few years in this country, Wisenheimer was the butt of many a joke in the territory, but honest and clean as a bone. He was not a member of the Highgrader gang, Jim was confident.

"Say, Skagway, I've been thinking," remarked Bullion Baker, wrinkling his brows. "Instead of prospecting for a dollar a day, why don't you try to land yourself a job with the Belle Union? A big husky like you ought to get on. I might even recommend you," he added, brightening.

"That would go a long way with Fitzharg, no doubt," Jim commented, with a dry irony that was lost on the former gambler. "But I'm off dredging for awhile."

"I don't mean a dredge job, Skagway. Undercover work."

"Yeah?" queried Jim, interested.

"There's good money in it," Bullion Baker confided. "Fitzharg wants the lowdown on what them river rats are taking out. It's a little dangerous if the rats find you're spying on them, but a husky like you could take care of yourself. Say the word and I'll see Fitzharg."

"Spy work, eh?" asked Jim.

"Well, the idea is that bunch of wobblies on the river have a grudge against the Belle Union. Us guards can't learn anything. Fitz has put a man or two among 'em to get the lowdown, and he's looking for a couple more. Company will stake you to buy an interest in on one of them claims down on the bar. Being a river rat, you could nose into every claim on the bar. All you'd have to do would be to report."

"I see. Win the confidence of the little owners, then sell 'em out to the Belle Union?" There was a hard twist to Jim Hardy's lips. "I'll tell you, Bullion. Playing sneaks doesn't appeal to me. Besides, if you'd suggest to Dan Fitzharg that he hire the Skagway Kid as an informer, he'd likely knock your block off. He knows where I'd stand in that game. Try him out."

Eyes narrowing, Bullion Baker squinted at the young Alaskan. "You mean you're lining up with these roughnecks against the Belle Union in this scrap?"

"I mean I'm one of the river rats, own a share in a claim down there, and intend to protect my rights and those of my partners, including Yuba George. Tell Fitzharg that. Another thing, Bullion. If you ever take another pot-shot at the kid, I'll start to do some shooting myself."

With this, Jim started with his burro down the river road. By way of precaution he pulled his rifle from his pack. With the weapon resting upon his bronzed, muscular forearm, he whacked the mouse-colored donkey with a stick and headed for Grizzly Bar, while the Belle Union guard stared after him, his brushy brows drawn into a scowl.

"We're river rats, Jenny, and no mistake," he addressed the burro. "Looks like it was up to us to block that River Demon somehow, to make good for Old Pocket Daniels, his little niece and Yuba George, eh what?"

The pack animal flicked her tail at the buzzing flies, as though it was of no concern to her.

## CHAPTER V

### *A Nosey Mouse*

DOWN on Grizzly Bar he found the little miner working his cradle, rocking the gravel and sand from the water's edge. "Hello, pard," greeted the Alaskan. "Let's get acquainted. I'm Jim Hardy—call me Jim," extending his hand. "Want me to help you put back that cable car?" He motioned to the auto seat lying on the bank.

"Sure. I never thanked you like I

should for pulling me out. I sure appreciate it."

Lifting the improvised carrier, the Alaskan carried it over under the cable. "This thing tied up on your claim, Yuba?" he asked, remembering Bullion Baker's assertion that the cable was secured on Belle Union property.

"Sure," the youngster affirmed, adding in response to Jim's question that both the rock to which the cable was fastened on the south side and the dead-man stump holding it on the north bank were on the west claim of the partners.

Before raising the makeshift tram, Jim noted that the rope holding the auto seat had been severed within a foot of the piece of upholstery. This told the story of the would-be assassin's intentions plainly enough. The bullet had cut the rope lower down than the position of the youngster's head at the time he was hurled into the stream. The ball had evidently just missed the lad's body, and it had certainly not been fired merely to cut the rope harmlessly above the head of the rider.

Jim did not mention the significance of his discovery to the little fellow, who would have enough to alarm him when he learned of the murder of Pocket Daniels. Raising the auto seat on his shoulder at the end of the cable, he tied it up with a square-knot.

"Getting rich around here, Yuba?" he asked.

"Run about three dollars a day, me and Pocket together," the boy informed.

"You're working on the short turn, which is correct. Figure to go on to bedrock, of course?"

"Nix, my pardner's disgusted. Pocket hates placering on the river. Grizzly Tom left him these two claims, and he divvied with me. He's a pocket-hunter, and says he'll take me up where there's big pay at the grass-roots if he can sell these claims for a decent price. That's what he's doing now—in San Francisco to try to make a deal."

A lump rose in Jim Hardy's throat. He hated to break the news, but there was no other way. "You haven't heard then," he said gently. "Your partner died getting off the ferry boat crossing San Francisco Bay."

"Not Pocket Daniels?" cried the lad, letting the handle of his rocker drop.

Jim nodded slowly.

For a time the little miner stared at him with a blank, bewildered expression on his ruddy face, while the pink faded to gray in his cheeks. "Pocket Daniels dead," he murmured, blinking. "Old Pocket dead." Walking around the crude wooden box that had been made into a gold-washing rocker, he sat down in the sand.

Jim broke the news as easily at he could, reserving until last the information that Pocket Daniels had been murdered. He told of the dying prospector's request that his share in the two claims on the Big Bonanza go to his niece in Sacramento and to Jim in equal parts, how Jim was to look after Yuba George and protect the interest of the niece after paying her a thousand dollars for the share the Alaskan was taking, not as a gift, but a purchase, sight unseen. In the old man's handwriting Jim displayed the paper conferring title.

"I haven't recorded it yet, for the reason I want to locate Pocket's niece and pay her first. Then, too, I'm anxious to see the Belle Union crowd show their hand," Jim explained.

"I guess they'll show their hand now, all right," Yuba George said bitterly. "They knifed Grizzly Tom to get these claims, but old Pocket didn't think they'd ever dare try to do that to him." His lip quivered and his eyes welled with tears. "It was on my account mostly that Pocket wanted to get rid of these claims—so they wouldn't harm me. He let on it was

because pocket-hunting was better. That's why my pard was killed, going to Frisco to try to make the deal for me." The little miner rubbed his eyes with his knuckles. "Next they'll be knifing both of us if we stay in this miserable hole."

"We'll see them coming when they try it, son," affirmed the Alaskan reassuringly. "No objections if I take a couple of samples?"

"No, sure. You're the boss now that Old Pocket ain't coming back."

"Not the boss, pard, since your share is bigger than mine," Jim corrected. "You own fifty per cent, Bessie Russell owns twenty-five and I own the same, but I still owe Pocket's niece the thousand, though it isn't stated here in the paper."

The Alaskan set to work, wading out until he was shoulder-deep. Then he stooped, head under water, and scooped up a panful.

Returning to the bank, he bent at the stream and immersed the vessel, twirling it with a gentle rolling motion that set the lighter slimy material over the edge of the pan in a grayish cloud. Yuba George watched in silence; something in the Alaskan's manner gave him confidence.

There was a twinkle in the blue eyes of Jim Hardy. A trace of "color" was in the pan, not yet half washed down.

"Who's that hustling up the bank?" he asked, nodding toward a newcomer.

"He's a sneak, always butting in," Yuba George informed in an undertone. "He's the 'Mouse.'"

By this time the stranger was at hand. "How's tricks, lads?" he asked, peering over into the pan.

The speaker looked more like a racetrack tout than a gold miner, a person of weazened, pinched countenance, shifty-eyed and small of stature. One of the river rats from the lower claims, he had come to be known as a pest among the other prospectors and miners, always circulating about and keeping an eye on what his neighbors were doing. There were some who had him pegged as a spy of the Belle Union. Yuba George had fittingly dubbed him the Mouse, which applied not only to his evasive, nervous manner, but to his diminutive size and protruding, bewhiskered countenance. The cap he wore accentuated his rodent aspect.

"How you makin' it, boys?" he persisted, slipping over toward the pair and poking his long nose almost into the pan. "Huh! No good. There won't be no stampede on account of that pan, pardners!"

The Alaskan was puzzled, for any man who was not blind could see a lot of moving color in that pan now, especially when he looked so closely at the contents as the Mouse was doing. Suddenly the cap-clad man took his leave, traveling down toward the miners working on the other claims.

"There's good pay there already!" exclaimed Yuba George. "And I bet you that sneak saw it, too. Wonder why he ducked away from here so quick?"

"Good riddance," grinned Jim. Unhurriedly he continued to reduce the dirt content, confident he would have some flax-seed gold before he had finished. Already he had glimpsed a sizable speck or two. Soft, sticky whitish clay made a milky haze in the pan while in motion; this he continued to reduce by steady twirling of the water, occasionally throwing out a chunk of the clay with the larger pebbles. In order to add to the surprise in store for the little miner he held the pan lower in the water and kept it churning rapidly enough to curtain the mineral until he had something sensational to reveal.

"Say, Pard! Look out!" whispered Yuba George after a time, stooping over the Alaskan's shoulder. "Here comes a couple toughs. I bet the Mouse was talking to them down there!"

Jim Hardy continued his panning,

while he glanced around. The two "toughs" were striding up as though bent on trouble. One of them was a beetle-browed bruiser who looked like a heavyweight pugilist; the other was taller, over six feet, wiry and raw-boned—Pug Derat and Sailor Binnard respectively, as Jim was to learn later.

"Hey, feller," growled Derat, stepping behind the stooping Alaskan. "What the hell you doin' here?" He made a threatening motion with a hammer he was carrying.

Jim Hardy rose, gold pan in hand. As he did so the lanky Binnard kicked with a powerful long leg, lifting the gold pan from the Alaskan's fingers and hurtling it into the stream, with its contents.

"Git off this claim!" howled the other bruiser, gripping the hammer as though to strike the unoffending Hardy. "You can't jump Pocket Daniels' bar—not a little bit—you damned thief!"

Jim Hardy saw red. "Drop that hammer, and I'll lick the pair of you!" he retorted hotly. It was obvious from the attitude of the intruders that they had picked the fight not because they suspected he was a claim-jumper, but because they did not want the bedrock gravel of this claim panned in the presence of the boy who was part owner.

"Clean him, Sailor!" wolfed Derat.

The two jumped to the attack, and the burly giant did not drop the hammer. He was swinging it, striking for the Alaskan's head. The lanky sailorman danced in from the other side, using his fists.

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Bone Breaker*

THE raw, battling ferocity that had brought him through many a conflict with savage men in the northland was on Jim Hardy now. A right forearm that was thewed with cords of bulging, glistening power shot up to meet the falling hammer, struck the handle and deflected the blow. At the same instant his left swung at the advancing Sailor Binnard and took him squarely under the ear. So suddenly was the blow struck that Binnard never saw it coming. The bruiser's mouth opened in a foolish, gaping expression of woe as he toppled backward, weak as a kitten, off the riverbank into the water.

Amazed at the abrupt collapse of his companion in the attack, Pug Derat had stepped back. Now he advanced once more, hammer again uplifted. Like an Indian wielding a stone-headed war-club, the burly battler leaped toward the tall Alaskan, the metal end of the hammer cutting an arc as it whirled for Jim Hardy's face.

Catlike, the Alaskan's body dipped downward and sideways in time to avoid the murderous blow. It seemed that only for a split second was Hardy crouched as the steel missile swept by his head. His supple frame shot upward and upon his attacker, and a fist as hard as nails struck the forearm of Derat, knocking the hammer from his fingers by sheer muscle-paralyzing might.

But the husky bruiser was not through. Rage in his slate eyes, he rushed at his adversary, bent on hurling him over the embankment where Sailor Binnard was floating like a corpse at the water's edge.

They came together within a foot of the eddying current, and the two of them lost their balance together and rolled and struggled in a contest of sheer brawn.

"Fight! Fight!" echoed up and down the gorge as the river rats turned from their work to hurry to the scene of the combat. Meanwhile the boy miner was pulling at the boots of Sailor Binnard at the base of the embankment, steering the unconscious battler onto the sand like a floating log. Derat and the Alaskan

were locked in neck and body holds, each trying to roll the other over the bank into the stream.

Strong as Pug Derat was, his two hundred and twenty pounds lacked the supple, twisting quality of Hardy's hundred-ninety, nor did he have the head work or training to play stress and strain in adequate degree against the foe who once had been billed as the Skagway Kid. Jim Hardy pinned his shoulders within three minutes, and now he was pressing the man at his mercy down through the soft sand to the edge of the water, a few feet from the prostrate Binnard's head.

"In you go, fellow, unless you talk," gritted Jim. "Why'd you jump me?"

"We was watchin' Old Pocket's claim!" panted Derat. "Lookin' out after the kid. We thought you was jumpin' it!"

"You lie," came the cold retort, and Jim Hardy forced the head of his antagonist under water.

He held him there, in spite of his struggles, for about a minute, then eased on his grip and let him raise his head and blubber for air.

"Talk!" came the insistent demand.

When Derat got his breath he muttered something about claim-jumpers stealing Old Pocket's gold during his absence. Again the Alaskan forced him under water.

By this time the river rats were nearing the scene, the foremost of them hooting and yipping about the fight. Jim continued to hold his victim in the river until water and air bubbled up out of his mouth, then once more let him come to the surface. "Talk," he snapped. "Next time you stay under!"

The all-but-exhausted Derat glared about him wildly, his throat contracting, his chest heaving.

"Holy mackerel, boys, he's licked 'em both!" exclaimed one of the miners, first of more than a dozen rushing up the bank.

"Talk, or in you go!" Jim threatened, again applying pressure.

"You're a damned Belle Union spy!" gasped Derat.

Jim released him, not so much because he believed the pair's attack on him had been made through suspicion he was a dredge company informer as because appearances were against him in trying to force a confession out of the man. It would look to the crowd as though he were trying to drown a vanquished antagonist.

"Let him up!" howled a stocky miner, crowding up just as Jim Hardy rose to his feet. Others emitted threatening growls of disapproval. The rapidly encircling mob was in an ugly mood, a low throaty roar rising in the gorge. While two of the river rats rushed over to the aid of the dazed Binnard in the sand a few yards away, a score of sullen men moved toward the Alaskan.

Jim was facing them, and he perceived from their manner that they were partisans of the pair who had attacked him. The stocky leader of the throng was short and broad, built like a rock, black-bearded, with a pair of elephantine legs that were spread apart, anchoring his peculiar body in the sand. His small, deep-set eyes were alight with battle and his beefy shoulders were thrust forward, carrying an almost neckless, bullet head.

"Look out, Grappo," warned one of the miners, "he's likely got a gun, lickin' 'em both that way!"

"Got de gun?" snarled the broad fellow.

"Didn't need one," replied Jim grimly.

"Knucklers, heh? Let's see de hands!"

Jim opened his palms, a dry smile at his lips.

"By Gawd!" said someone huskily.

The crowd surged forward a step, the rocklike Grappo in the center. Jim did not give an inch. Grappo's huge arms went out in a gesture to the mob to stand back.

"Give him a chance, boys." The tall old miner whom Yuba George had addressed as Uncle Jack pushed forward. "He's the lad that pulled Yuba out of the river. Maybe he ain't a Belle Union spy, after all."

"The hell he ain't!" wolfed one.

"Wait a minute, boys," insisted Uncle Jack. "You made a mistake sendin' Sailor Binnard and Pug Derat up here to jump him until you made sure he was a spy."

"He ain't sayin' a word! He ain't even denyin' he's a Belle Union stoolie!" gruffed one of the group. "Bust him, Grappo, and make him talk!"

Again the abnormally broad fellow raised his great, gorilla arms to hold the mob. Then without a word to indicate what he had in mind, he walked toward Jim Hardy, his arms at his sides.

Those arms were startlingly peculiar, bare from the greasy brown shoulder down, heavy with black hair, large in girth, apelike in length, out of all proportion to the short legs of the man. Jim was watching those arms, also he took note of the ball-like aspect of his body, rotund, mighty in a way, muscle-laden in spite of the apparent fatness, like some of the Japanese mat artists the Alaskan had seen in the ring.

"You come along wit us, see," Grappo said, in a deep-toned voice, continuing his slow advance. "If you don', I break afry bone in de body, see? Oh my, yes." He raised and lowered those big arms like a pair of wings flapping.

"Go with you? Where?" asked Jim curiously.

"To de spy trap, heh! Oh my, yes!"

"Break him, Grappo," urged someone. "Then he'll squeal quicker."

"By golly!" the ape-man ejaculated.

Jim's eyes were bleak. "Start breaking me right now, if that's how you feel about it," he said flatly.

A subdued murmur went through the crowd, an undertone of awe and surprise combined with a sinister eagerness to see the two come to grips. Jim Hardy knew he might as well see the thing through now as any other time. If he expected to become a power among these river rats, one whose word would have any weight in dealing with the Belle Union, he must show no fear of this bone-breaker among them.

"Bust him, Grappo!" yipped a voice, which Jim noted came from the weazened prospector called the Mouse.

"No, don't! Jim is my pardner!" called out Yuba George, who had been jostled back to the rear of the mob.

The ape-man made a sudden leap for the Alaskan, his huge arms jumping out wide as though to lock about Jim's body and pinion his elbows like a vise.

But Jim Hardy sprang under the intended grip and, with a dextrous, lightning reach, grasped the stovepipe legs of the burly one at the ankles. One mighty heave, with his shoulders as the fulcrum, and the Alaskan hurled the ape-man over his head backwards like a rubber ball into the water.

The splash sounded as though a baby elephant had flopped into the stream.

"He can't swim!" croaked a gold digger. "He'll drown; he can't swim a stroke!"

True enough, Jim Hardy saw him floundering helplessly in the water, raising those hairy arms as his head went under the surface. Peeling off his vest, the Alaskan jumped into the stream.

He managed to get under the struggling Grappo a dozen yards down below the scene of the unusual contest. Swimming on his back, Jim grabbed the man's shirt collar and pulled him into shallow water. Choking, blubbering and gasping, Grappo got to his feet with the help of his rescuer and plopped through the stream to the bank.

A dumb, speechless crowd of river rats watched the Alaskan give the burly one his hand and raise him onto dry ground.

"By Gawd!" said someone, breaking silence.

"He's a Belle Union spy, jest the same," growled another. "Lefty seen him in the dredgin' office in Frisco!"

The Alaskan moved over to the line of men on the river bank, his clothes dripping. "What's this thing I heard mentioned awhile ago about a spy trap, partners?" he asked genially. "I'm as anxious as you are to get matters straight."

Still belligerent, the crowd surged about the speaker. "Hand him the Seventh Degree!" wolfed a hair-lipped miner. "Put him on the rail!" seconded another, and one irate river rat shrilled the invitation to "slip the dirty spy the works!"

Jim Hardy raised a hand. Before he could speak a howl of warning came from the rear: "Look out, boys —he's goin' to make a break!" It was the Mouse who had acted as trouble maker, without justification for the false alarm.

In another moment the mob rushed on the Alaskan. Wedging him in the center, they bore him to the ground. Four men were directly on top of him, pinioning his arms, grasping his legs and holding him. The victim did not struggle, knowing resistance against such odds was impossible.

"Sack him!" belched one at the outer edge of the crowd, tossing an empty gunny sack into the mass.

*(Perhaps it is a misunderstanding that has involved Hardy in trouble. Or perhaps it is a plot. Continue this exciting novel in the next issue of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. You won't want to miss the thrilling outcome of Hardy's adventures.)*


## *Three stories to watch for!*

**THE TESTIMONY OF THE DOG**

*a dog story by Ray Nafziger*

**INJUNS WALK STRAIGHT**

*a Western story by Bud Jones*

**MUGS AND MITTENS**

*a boxing story by James W. Egan*

## *In the First January issue!*

# *HORSES*

*By W. F. Clark*

**This is a most interesting article about horses and their names.**

BOTH horses and cattle were brought into North America four centuries ago by the Spanish invaders of Mexico. Some authorities claim that the American "bronco" (presumably from the Spanish *bronco* meaning "rough, unbroken") is a descendant of the sixteen Barbary horses in the Cortez expedition. (The Barbary horse is undoubtedly close kin, if not the actual ancestor of the true Arabian. The "barb" and Arabian both have five lumbar vertebrae, while all other horses have six. This accounts for the short, proud bodies of the barb and Arabian and the high carriage of their tails.)

However, history reveals that in addition to Cortez' sixteen horses, Alvarado, who joined Cortez at Vera Cruz, had twenty head, while Narvaez brought nine hundred and eighty. Following the conquest of Mexico, other adventurous Spaniards arrived with more horses, which, together with the hundred and fifteen landed in Florida by DeSoto, formed the nucleus from which sprang the horse of North America.

The New World proved an ideal range for these horses and the long-horned Andalusian cattle of the Spaniards, and they increased rapidly. As the invaders pushed northward in their explorations, many of their horses and cattle strayed, were stolen or were lost in skirmishes with the Indians. Away from the mastery of man, these in time reverted to their natural state and were forbears of the "wild horses" and "wild cattle" that eventually were to become the foundation of the great livestock-growing industry.

The Indian was the first to recognize the usefulness of the wild horses. From those he captured and tamed sprang the "Indian pony," which is not, as many believe, a special breed of horses. Cross-breeding of the wild, one-colored barbs produced the "calico" or "paint pony" of the Southwest, the roan of the Northwest and the claybank, bay, sorrel and multi-colored animals we know today.

On the Pacific coast, the wild horses mingled with the animals of the Argonauts to produce the "mustang." From herds roaming in the Northwest came the "Oregon horse," which later was to become the progenitor of the "cayuse"—named for a tribe of Indians in Washington.

As the pioneers of the 40's and 50's plunged deeper into the Western wilderness, they encountered great herds of wild horses and cattle. Following the example of the Mexicans and Indians, they began capturing the brutes, sometimes on great round-ups, at other times walking them down. Thus the livestock industry was born and the cowboy came into being.

The necessity for food was greater than the need of travel. So, from the dawn of ranching in the United States, cattle raising was more general in extent than the raising of horses. For this reason, the majority of cowboys were associated more closely with cattle than with horses. While occasionally a combined horse and cow ranch could be found, as a rule the stockmen specialized in either one or the other. Yet owing to the illimitable stretches of unfenced "range" and with no other means of travel, all cattlemen were forced to keep enough horses to transport their cowboys and to bring supplies from the villages that sprang up through the vast region. While cattle ranches were scattered throughout the West, the larger horse ranches were located in Texas and Oregon, as wild horses were found there in larger numbers.

So great were the inroads into the wandering herds that by 1880 the wild horse had virtually disappeared from the plains. However, due to motor transportation and machinery, which has replaced him, the last few years have seen the wild horse increasing rapidly in the Rocky Mountain region. Round-ups are held annually; not, as once, for the purpose of gathering the brutes to build up a new industry, but to rid the country of the prowling bands.

From the dawn of ranching, the cowboy has been dependent upon the horse for transportation. Small wonder then that it has become his pal, his constant companion with whom he talks as though with a human to break the lonely hours on the silent trails. Small wonder that the pride of every puncher is his horse, that he cares for it winter and summer, protects it, fights for it and names it. And the names that cowboys give their horses are as a rule surprisingly appropriate, although a keen sense of humor sometimes is shown in the name of a saddle horse.

The remuda came thundering into the Three J ranch in northern Wyoming one morning. In the lead galloped a great, iron-gray gelding.

"Saddle Tom Thumb fer me," the ranch owner ordered, indicating the gray.

"Tom Thumb?" a visitor exclaimed. "That's a fine name fer a strappin' big geldin' like that. Thought Tom Thumb was a little gent?"

"That hoss come by his name thisaway," the rancher explained. "Tom Walker used to be right smart of a bronc-peeler here years ago. He busts Tom Thumb yonder when he ain't nothin' but a green grass colt. The hoss don't do nothin'.

" 'Thumb him, Tom!' somebody hollers.

"Tom does. That colt onlimbers. Busts three of Tom's ribs an' they don't get his saddle back till next day. Ever after that, when the jaspers got sore at Walker, they'd yell: 'Tom thumb!' The name just naturally hung to the hoss. To this day, it ain't been rode an' thumbed. Gentle? Plumb. Till he's thumbed. Thumbin' just kinda seems to bust all hell loose in Tom Thumb."

As an illustration of how appropriately some horses were named, there was "Whistler," a big bay gelding that once carried one of the finest cowboys in the West. Whistler always whistled through his nostrils when he became frightened.

The first time out of the corral, "Bullberry Johnny" threw his rider in a bullberry patch. The name clung until the old brute died.

"Dynamite" was all his name implied. And many a northern Wyoming cowboy fought shy of Dynamite in a cavvy string, for Dynamite had been known to "onlimber and onload" his hapless rider even after he had done fifty miles in a blazing sun. And true to his name, Dynamite "shot" down and sidewise instead of up.

"Wire Fence" made a name for himself. Where other horses would fight shy of barbed wire, it held no terror for the battle-scarred veteran of a hundred serious encounters. Once Wire Fence "got his head" and tucked it between his fetlocks, he pitched straight for the first fence in sight, obviously wise to the fact that, while the sharp barbs held no terror for him, most riders would "quit" him before he struck and thus he would be free until rounded up and mounted again.

"Old Hackamore" who had pitched savagely when ridden with a "war bridle" (a brutal hitch of rope in the mouth and around the lower jaw) passed into new hands and was ridden by a cowboy who scorned the use of the war bridle. Old Hackamore never made a crooked jump after the war bridle was replaced by the hackamore.

"Water Skip" did just that. No

ditch was too wide if he caught the gleam of water beneath him. Many a rider has been left on the prairie by Water Skip who had lunged into the air to cross a puddle with scarcely a sip of water in it.

"Boomerang" was rated the best "end-swappin'" pitcher in southern Montana. And, according to the cowboys who rode him, he always landed at his starting place.

"Torpedo" was a temperamental cuss. No one ever knew when he was going to blow up.

Lovers of mares perhaps wonder why they seldom, if ever, are mentioned among famous range saddle horses. Mares are never a part of the "remuda." While the mare has played her part in building up the herds of the West, as a saddle horse she is a failure, simply because, filled as she is with maternal instinct, she is a "bunch-quitter" and cannot be depended upon to remain with the saddle band. The cowboy quickly learned that the gelding or even the stallion was the brute of strength and brawn that could do his work and still be depended upon to remain with the cavvy.

"Silver Tip" was a beautiful horse; a rich, glistening sorrel with cream-colored mane and tail. Standing seventeen hands high, the brute made a name for itself as a running horse as well as for its beauty.

While "Sleepy Ned" might appear to be a name unsuited to a crack Wyoming race horse of other years, it was decidedly appropriate. Unlike other running horses, Sleepy Ned's first thought after winning a swift race was to shift his weight to three legs and doze.

When "Sky-high" pitched, he went "clean up yonder" to land with a bone-crushing impact that broke the crystal of many a cowboy's watch.

"High Roller" might have been Sky-high's brother. But while Sky-high was a terrific pitcher, he did not have the streak of treachery in his make-up that High Roller had. High Roller killed a man. It took that man's son many years, but he finally bucked the brute down.

"Cloud-buster" was another animal that went skyward with its rider at every opportunity and many times "got his man."

While as a rule the horses on western ranches are "halter broke," trained to run with the remuda, and come into the round-up camps snorting and kicking in the morning, many of them always "have a hump in their backs." That means only one thing—pitch. And pitch they do every time a saddle is cinched onto them.

The cowboy's knowledge of poker is shown in the names of "Ace-high," a famous Colorado round-up horse, and "Joker," who turned out to be more than that for at least one hapless puncher who landed in a cactus bed.

"Old Hole Card" was a mystery. Many men tried to find out what his hold card was; but like a "stud" game, Hole Card refused pointblank to show his hand until some unfortunate puncher dragged him out of a rope corral of a morning. It took him but a few wicked jumps to demonstrate that he possessed a store of pitching tricks which equalled the mystery of any stud game hole card.

"Fifteen Two's" owner is a cribbage fiend. "Solo" is named for his master's favorite game. "Cold Deck" has many times been accused of cheating. And cheat he does, stopping at nothing to unseat his rider, even to falling over backwards, a playful little trick that has crushed two men beneath the saddle horn.

Then there was "Seven Up," "Queen of Spades," "Ten of Spades" and old "Eight of Hearts."

The puncher who owned and rode "Tiddle-de-winks" probably never played that game, but the monicker was given the brute because of a mincing patter of its tiny hoofs on hard ground.

From games cowboys run to firearms and explosives for their horses' names. Probably because they are dangerous. And so are the horses.

"Explosion" is all of that. He was named the first time a saddle ever was slapped onto his back. He exploded properly.

"Black Powder" was just the opposite of Dynamite. Instead of shooting down, he went up like a charge of black powder.

"Cannonball" not only was a crack running horse for years, but he always was a cruel and savage pitcher that few men could ride.

"Mile High" stood eighteen hands and weighed twelve hundred odd pounds. While never a bucking horse, the big brute was tireless and noted as the "longest-winded" horse on the range.

"Bone Crusher" got his name the first time he was ever ridden. He broke a cowboy's leg.

Occasionally range horses are named for injuries or peculiarities. "One Eye" was just the plain "hellion" for months. And while many bronco-peelers had threatened to gouge the outlaw's eye out with the rowels, it remained for a jagged clothes-pole to do the work for them. One Eye got loose from the corral one dark night and, in prowling about the yard, ran into the end of the clothes-pole. That pole "got" an eye. And One Eye got a name. But it did in nowise improve his disposition.

"Glass Eye," "Chalk Eye," "Wicked Eye," "Bad Eye" and "White Eye" are names that are "dead giveaways" of the character of the brutes who bore them. (A "bad hoss" usually rolls its eyes back until the whites show, although many of the pinto, calico or paint ponies already have "chalk eyes"—colorless orbs.)

"Cake Walk" was a "gaited" pitcher. Some cowboys claimed he had more movements than a watch. His peculiar manner of shuffling along and "throwing his head" gave him his name. Many cowboys' noses have been broken by a horse throwing its head. (For this reason a martingale—a check rein tied to the cinch—is employed.) "One Step," "Two Step," "The Waltzer," "Old Schottishe," etc., are horses' names that show the rider's favorite dance.

"Tornado" was a whirlwind of activity. "Sour Grapes" won his name after a first-class bronc-peeler had been thrown and refused to ride him again, although he could—but offered no money to prove it—"buck hell out of the devil till the sun went plumb down."

"Shinook" warms every rider who dares to "step across" him.

"Lightnin'" was quick as a flash. He was a "peg pony," or cutting horse. An artist, staying for a summer on the ranch where Lightnin' was one of the pets, asked if he might run out some horses that had broken into the pasture. With reluctance the rancher granted the request, cautioning the artist not to attempt to guide the pony but to allow it free rein and hang on for dear life. The artist stayed exactly one lightning turn!

"Rattler" was treacherous. But he always gave warning by a hissing snort before he went "high, wide an' pretty."

"Penny" is just about that big—a coppery little roan mare. She is a pet saddle horse around the X Bar X home ranch. When her first colt was born, it resembled her so closely that it immediately became "Half Penny."

"Zebra Dun" no doubt is named for the song the "gent" who stopped at the camp at the head of the Cimarron to "auger" and then was staked to the Zebra Dun.

"Kettle Drum," a big-rumped stallion, got tangled up with a wash tub on his first pitching ruckus. He stopped pitching long enough to kick the tub all over the ranch yard. Still another Kettle Drum was named after

a Sioux Indian who led the last uprising of the Sioux in Wyoming in 1903. Many horses were to be found on the range in earlier days named after Indians, or tribes. The most famous of these perhaps was "Commanche," Custer's mount which, although badly wounded, managed to escape alive from the battle of the Little Big Horn.

Occasionally bad horses are named for the towns and places from which they come — "Cody," "Jerome," "Blackhills," "Powder River." Then again they are named after people—"Babe Ruth," "Doc Henry," "Uncle Sam," "Jack Dempsey," and "Paddy Ryan," after the gamest little Irishman who ever won the world championship bronc-busting contest.

Sometimes they take their names after the ranches from which they come—"U Gray," "Buzzard Black," "W O Gray" or "Cross O Baldy." Again, the brute's name may be an indication as to its disposition and prowess. "Widow Maker" is supposed to be sure-fire for disappointed brides. And while Widow Maker never has killed a bronc-peeler, he has put several top-hands in the hospital. "Rough and Ready" is just plenty rough and always ready to buck at the drop of a hat.

The names of animals like the names of people strike on instantly as fitting or being inappropriate. Of all the horses rightly named, "Dirty Boy," a pitcher from Powder River, being bucked at northern Wyoming rodeos and fairs, takes top money. Dirty Boy is everything his name implies. Only the top-notchers can ride him.

"Fog Horn," another Wyoming outlaw, emits a throaty and terrifying bawl while he is "shootin' the works."

"Old Steamboat" one of the greatest pitchers that ever bucked down a hard-riding cowboy—and he bucked down many during the years he was the unquestioned monarch of the rodeos—no doubt got his name from his steamboat bawl.

"Midnight," probably the most famous of living pitching horses and who has made world champions "hunt cover" with amazing regularity for the last few years, was once a saddle horse. After having been "plumb gentle" for a spell, Midnight happened to pitch off his rider. From that day on he has been blasting championship dreams. He was named for his color, being a huge black. The best rodeo performers in the country have been trying to ride Midnight since he made his appearance as a champion bucker. Never yet has the brute been ridden the full ten seconds.

It is apparent in these later days that the name has the tang of the rodeo fields. Hence "Brown Eyes"—which weren't brown when they were "skinned back to the whites;" "I Wanta," "Sweet Mamma," "Broken Heart," "Hesitation," "Ice Wagon"—and he does a right smart job of rumbling along; "Scarecrow"—and "scare man" too, if the truth were told; "Dead Wagon"—and he is a hearse to many a cowboy's ambitions.

Still with the taint of the rodeos upon them come other bad "hosses." "Homesick," "Irish Tom," "Hoosier Jack," "Sweden," "Red Skin," "Funny Face," "Tip Toes." Some of them are airy, fairy names but withal hard names to master while "up" or "comin' out." "Mystery," "Sealskin," "Teapot," "Chili Bean," "Over-all Bill"—smooth enough sounding but devils for all their names.

Occasionally a puncher is misled by a horse's name. "Invalid" certainly is a misnomer, for Invalid is about the healthiest and hardest pitching brute going sky-high with bronc-peelers today. On the other hand, "Black Spirit" gives a rider a good indication of the animal's character. But "Sweet Mamma" is rough to say the least.

# *WOLF ALL WINTER*

*By W. Ryerson Johnson*

**The two wolf hunters got almighty tired of eating wolf, after a wolverine had done for their cache of food. But the worst came when they hadn't even wolf to eat. . . .**

BIG BILL CAGLE, wolf hunter, sat muttering in his double-walled silk tent, while outside the wind howled. Hurling down from polar seas, that wind had a clean sweep of a thousand miles across pack ice and frozen tundra. Here, on the fringe of the Great Canadian Barrens, it lashed itself into a final gigantic fury before pitting its might against the belt of staunchly entrenched timber to the south.

But it wasn't the storm which bothered Bill. Snugly surrounding the tent, he and his partner had built a sturdy breastworks of stone. The tent was safe. Let the wind roar.

No, it wasn't the storm which seered Bill's honest soul, rubbed his nerves raw—and riled his stomach. It was the diet.

"Fer two months now," he grumbled, "nothin' but wolf. Boiled wolf fer breakfast, baked wolf fer dinner, and fried wolf fer supper. Jist wolf, wolf, wolf. . . . Not even no salt to go on it!"

Indistinctly above the storm tones, Bill heard a familiar shout. He moved aside from the tiny sheet-iron stove, and unfastened the front fly of the tent. From out of the early evening darkness, a snow-caked figure burst in.

He was a little man, Bill's partner. As he threshed about, stamping his feet, brushing the snow from his garments, he was all over the place, like a terrier.

Pawing out a last double handful of snow from around his neck, he jerked his head free from his dicky hood and grinned. In the light of the oil lamp, his touseled hair shone yellow, his eyes blue. His cheeks were the rosy red of highland cranberries.

The little man's cherubic features had earned him the name of Doll Face. Doll Face Dappleman—wolfer! Known to outland Indians, *Métis* and

whites as the mightiest wolf exterminator between the Rockies and Hudson's Bay.

Year after year Doll Face Dappleman cleaned up his five or ten thousand dollars in wolf hides. The tough little man trapped wolves, shot wolves, clubbed wolves. He had even tried hunting them from an airplane with a machine gun.

This season, teamed up with Big Bill Cagle, he had arranged with a birdman friend to be set down in this remote spot to the north and east of Great Slave on the edge of the Barren Grounds. It was late August when they landed. That very first night a wolverine broke into their temporary cache; ate, despoiled, or carried away their whole season's food supply.

The wolverine, or carcajou, is the most hated animal in the North. Possessed of diabolical cunning and prodigious strength, the short-legged, stocky animal robs traps, breaks into caches, and destroys wantonly, seemingly out of sheer malice.

The partners recovered a little tea, picked up laboriously leaf by precious leaf. A few ragged twists of tobacco, also, they reclaimed. Beyond this they saved practically nothing.

Winter set in early. Birds and animals fled south to the timbered growth. To date, late in October, the erratic caribou had not yet appeared in their great seasonal migration from their summer grazing grounds far to the north. It was a year of famine in the Barrens. Only the wolves remained on the white plains. Skulking in packs, they awaited the caribou hordes.

Working with traps and rifles, the partners had made heavy inroads into the wolf population. But even their mounting stock of hides could not keep Bill from grumbling over the despised diet of wolf flesh.

"I came out here to hunt wolves, not to eat 'em," he harangued, while Doll Face skinned out of his parka. "Now you take you, it don't matter—you can eat wolf. You got a stomach like tanned moose hide, and a appetite like a goat. But me, I'm by nature finicky. I got a delicate stomick. And anyway, I'm a epicure."

"Huh? What's that?"

"A epicure is a food fancier. And one thing a epicure don't fancy is wolf three times a day. Or once a day."

Warming up by the stove, Doll Face grinned. "So you're all fed up on wolf, huh?"

Bill glared. "I'm so fed up on wolf, I could even eat a owl and like it."

The grin broadened. The blue eyes twinkled. "You have got your wish, big boy, you have got your wish."

Ducking to the front of the tent, the little man loosened the fly, poked an exploring hand outside and drew it in again clutching a bulky, snow-covered object. "I was keepin' it fer a surprise," he stated, vigorously dusting off the snow.

Bill gazed suspiciously. "What is it?"

"Owl. Great Arctic owl."

"Huh?" Swift alarm overspread Bill's features as, with Doll Face pawing off the snow, the white-feathered bird took shape before his eyes. He cleared his throat and spoke cautiously ly. "It is, ain't it?"

"Is what?"

"A owl."

"Course it is. I got him over in that bunch of dwarf pines. Snuck up behind him in the storm, grabbed him and wrung his neck like you would a chicken."

Bill rubbed his whisker-stubbled chin. "Well," he said, doubtfully, "I guess it can't be much worse'n wolf."

"And it'll be a change."

"How do you cook owl—so's it tastes the least worst?"

"I been thinkin' we might make a chowder."

"Owl chowder?"

"Yeah."

Bill rubbed his chin again. "How do you make owl chowder?"

"Well, first you take the owl, and cut it up and put it in boiling water. Course, if we had some seasonin' it would make it taste better—"

"Yeah," Bill interrupted with ponderous sarcasm, "some seasonin', and some potatoes, and onions—and mebbe a little strychnine to kill the owl taste, would make it be a whole lot better."

"Now, Bill," Doll Face grinned, "you're prejudiced agin my owl."

"No, I ain't," Bill protested. "I'm jist tryin' to figger a way that we can make owl chowder so's it won't taste so much like plain boiled owl."

"I'm downright surprised at you, Bill. You bein' a epicure, you ought to know that the difference between owl chowder and boiled owl is that to the chowder you add a pinch of tobacco. Some inclines to tea leaves, but I always favored tobacco as bein' a more noticeable seasonin'."

Bill looked apprehensively at the owl. "That ain't sech a bad idee," he said, frowning. "Since tobacco and tea is all we got to mix with the owl for the chowder, I favors the tobacco myself. Only what I think is—jist in case the tobacco might make the owl worse—we better cook up a special tobacco sauce separate from the owl, and then we can mix it with the chowder afterwards if it tastes like it needs it."

While the wind howled and the snow swirled, the owl simmered. Sober Bill Cagle became almost jovial in anticipation of breaking his two-months' diet of wolf meat. He was the first to taste the owl after it was cooked.

"Huh," he said, layin' down his spoon, "call it chowder if you want, but it tastes like plain boiled owl to me."

Eating hungrily, Doll Face made no answer.

"Don't you think it does?" Bill persisted.

"I don't know, Mr. Cagle," Doll Face answered grimly. "I don't claim to be no epicure, myself. How do I know if it tastes like boiled owl when I never et no boiled owl before?"

"Pass the tobacco sauce," growled Bill. He poured a little of the tobacco water into the stew, and tasted. "That's better. Without the tobacco, it tastes a little mousy, don't you think?"

Doll Face shrugged. "How would I know, Mr. Cagle? As I have told you already, I ain't no epicure. I never et a mouse. I been lookin' fer some though. If owls can find 'em, I ought to. Mebbe one of these days...."

Between them, they finished the owl—and not a little of the tobacco sauce. That night Bill dreamed he was being torn limb from limb by a pack of boiled wolves, while a boiled owl flapped around and pecked at his eyes.

In the morning Doll Face remarked, "There's somethin' I would of told you last night, only I didn't want to spoil your enjoyment of the owl none."

Bill braced himself for bad news. "What is it?"

"We *almost* had caribou instead of owl."

"What?" Bill demanded excitedly. "Did you see a caribou?"

Doll Face nodded. "First one this season. Young buck. He wasn't fifty yards from me."

"And you didn't shoot him?"

"Well, he was holdin' off a pack of wolves, see? Well, naturally I'd shoot the wolves first—"

Bill groaned. "Naturally, you would! You shot the wolves and let that caribou get away!"

"Well, you know how it is. It's excitin' shootin' wolves. All my bullets was gone before I knowed it. While I was reloadin', Mr. Caribou, he walked out on me."

Bill's throat worked convulsively and he stared in a daze. "It's more'n likely," he said finally, "that that's our first and last caribou. Around here, they don't come trottin' from

every which way, like they do farther up in the Barrens. They mass up at the edge of the woods and move south in two or three big herds. There's millions in them herds. But this frontier's hundreds of miles long. Even the Yellowknives can't predict from year to year where the herds will cross. Unless a man happens, jist happens, to be camped right in the path of *La Foule*, he's like not to sight a caribou all winter."

Bill shook his head dolefully. "It's two more months," he continued, "two more whole months before Jake Haley comes with his airplane to pick us up. And all that time, instead of nice juicy caribou, we'll have to be eatin' wolf! We've et wolf all fall. Now we'll be eatin' wolf all winter! And it's your fault, Doll Face. You had a chance to shoot some wolves or the caribou, and you shot the wolves."

"Well," Doll Face flared, "what'd we come out here for? Was it to hunt wolves or caribou?"

Bill looked long at his partner, with a sad and suffering expression on his rugged face. "There is," he said, "a thousand names I could call you, and none of 'em wouldn't exaggerate much. But I'm past callin' names. I'm practically paralyzed from thinkin' about all the wolf I've et, and all the more I've got to eat. Doll Face, I've heard 'em say that wolves goes to your head like likker, that pointin' you out a wolf is like wavin' a white fish in front of a starvin' husky. Well, I believe 'em, Doll Face. You're wolf crazy, that's what, wolf crazy."

"Well," Doll Face grinned, "when I hunts wolves, I hunts wolves. I'm downright sorry, though, Bill, now that I see how much you would enjoy it, that I didn't shoot you the caribou. I keep forgettin'—you're bigger'n me, and you got to eat more. Mebbe if I had to eat as much as you do, I'd git tired of wolf meat, too. And speakin' of wolf reminds me I got to rustle us a coupla choice chops for breakfast."

Doll Face reached for his parka and pulled it on, preparatory to plunging outside and securing meat from their rock cache.

"It's still snowin' and I don't like it," he confided. "We're short on meat, and as long as this storm hangs on, we won't have much chance of stockin' up. We better go easy on the meat for a while."

"You can't go too easy for me," Bill rumbled. "I'm so fed up on wolf that I wish the carcajou'd bust into the cache again and steal every pound we've got."

Doll Face pulled on his heavy mitts, unfastened the tent fly, and ducked out into the storm. He was gone an alarmingly long time. When he came back he said, soberly, looking intently at Bill:

"You have got your wish, big boy, you have got your wish."

"Huh? Whaddya mean?"

"You said you wished the carcajou'd bust into the cache and steal all the meat. That's jist what he's done; he ain't done nothin' else. We haven't got no more to eat than a polar bear on a iceberg. Not even wolf."

WHEN a man must live off the country, the specter of starvation is forever dogging his heels. Even in a land of plenty, an empty larder is a danger signal not to be overlooked. In a land of famine, it may very well be the sign of death itself.

Experienced outland men, Bill and Doll Face knew what they were up against. They promptly dropped all their horse-play and set about the serious business of saving their lives. First, they fought their way against buffeting wind and lashing snow to the place where Doll Face had seen the caribou. Here, yesterday, he had killed three wolves. Today, there were no wolf carcasses. In the night, the famished pack had returned. Only a few frozen knobs of bones remained.

The partners had anticipated this loss. Without waste of time, they pressed on to run their trap line. They hadn't many traps. Only so many as they had been able to transport conveniently in the airplane. They relied more on their rifles than the traps.

On the fur path they found their first three traps inoperative because of the banked snow. This, too, they had expected, since the unbaited traps had been set in deep animal runways.

Their fourth trap was inoperative also. This they had *not* expected. It wasn't the drifted snow which balked them here. The wolf meat bait had been stolen, the trap sprung, pulled up from its stake, and dragged twenty yards away.

"Carcajou," Doll Face said, tersely.

"Yeah," said Bill.

"When one of those hell-slinkers gets started on your fur path, sometimes he'll clean out every trap on the line."

"Yeah," said Bill.

They slogged on through the swirling snow. The next trap had also been visited by the despised marauder. And the next. And the next.

It was late that night when, tired and ravenously hungry, the partners finally returned to their tent. They had run their entire line. Such traps as were not made inoperative by the deep snow had all been sprung by the rapacious carcajou.

For supper, they broke their day's fast with strong tea—and ate the tea leaves.

"Tomorrow," said Doll Face, "we'll pull up the traps and tail out a new fur path. Mebbe that'll fool the damned critter."

"Mebbe," said Bill, "but we haven't got any bait."

"There's a chance somethin' *might* step in one of the traps. Anyway, it ain't snowin' much now, and what snow's in the air is mostly bein' blown up off the ground. If visibility's better tomorrow, we might get a shot at a caribou."

"Mebbe, but it's almost November. Late for the caribou migration. Sometimes, even, they mass up as early as September. It's more'n likely that they're already down into the woods around Artillery and McKay, and we've missed 'em."

Doll Face grinned gamely. "They say," he said, "that after the first day you don't get much hungrier. I went three days once—it wasn't so bad."

Bill's own rugged face warped into a slow grin. "In a way, it's kind of a relief not to have to eat no wolf tonight."

Doll Face nodded. "You'll appreciate wolf more after a little fast."

"Nothin'," said Bill, scowling, "could make me appreciate wolf. Come on, let's turn in. We got to conserve our strength."

By morning it had quit snowing. But that north wind still held. Everywhere, it whipped the powdery snow from the ground and lashed it into swirling spindrifts. Visibility throughout the day was poor—well under 400 yards. Several times both Bill and Doll Face swung their rifles to shoulder in feverish excitement as the shifting snow devils revealed a dark object. But each time the alarm proved false. The object darkly looming was never a caribou, but always a wind-cleaned boulder or one of the low umbrella-shaped pines.

They took up as many of their traps as they had time for, and made new sets. Bill remembered the knobs of bones which the wolf pack had left, and he went to get them, thinking that if they were put to boiling long enough, some slight amount of nourishment might be obtained. But the wolves, or the carcajou, had come back. The bones were gone.

For supper again they had tea. And tea leaves.

On the morning of the third day, a fierce wind still blew out of the north. The partners trudged in stony silence to their new sets, hoping, fearing.

They were right to fear. The traps were empty.

Once during the short day, Bill was positive that he had sighted a herd of moving caribou. He banged away with his rifle, then a shift in the wind dimly revealed a long, black ridge of glacial dump with snow seething over it in fantastic stringers.

That evening they laughed over their tea, each denying to the other his awareness of their critical position. Both Bill and Doll Face knew that, every year, famine snuffed out lives in the Barren Grounds. Improvident Indians and *Métis* depended utterly upon the caribou. And when the caribou did not come—

The fourth day was a close duplicate of the third, except that along toward evening the wind veered and commenced blowing from out of the east. This time for supper, they boiled some fine-cut pieces of wolf hide. As on the previous night, they laughed often, and their eyes were bright with that glitter characteristic of the early degrees of starvation.

From somewhere in the distance, a wolf chorus howled. Doll Face took his rifle after supper and went out, as he said, "to give those wolves something to howl about."

It was three hours before he dragged back.

"They're wary," he said, disheartened. "Couldn't get near 'em."

"That's all right," Bill laughed quickly—too quickly. "You remember I'm a epicure and I don't cater none to wolf nohow."

"There's one encouragin' thing," Doll Face pointed out. "The wind's blowin' dead out of the east now. You know how caribou always likes to head into the wind? Whenever they can, I mean, and still make their general direction? Well, this is the absolute latest you could expect any caribou to be crossin' timber line. So if there's any herd on the frontier now, this wind'll more'n likely turn 'em from a straight south direction and make 'em head east. There'll be more chance of 'em passin' near us."

"Yeah," Bill ruminated, "unless they happen to be east of us already. In that case, this wind'll move 'em farther away than ever."

Doll Face shrugged wearily. "We can't have all the aces. Them caribou might as well be ten thousand miles away as ten."

THE next morning the partners were awakened to the sound of a distant trampling. They sat up clutching their blankets while they listened, their faces tense and haggard, eyes glittering, lips tightly pressed.

"Do you hear anything, Bill?" Doll Face asked hoarsely.

Bill wet his lips, and swallowed. "Yeah," he said, "I hear it."

Doll Face made a lunge at the tent fly. His hands fumbled at the fastenings. "Bill," he shouted, jerking aside, "you unfasten it. My hands is tremblin' too much."

Bill, the iron-nerved, unfastened the fly. Together, they hastily stumbled outside.

Though the sky was gray, the weird snow devils had ceased their dance. Visibility was improved.

With a cry of joy, Doll Face started jumping up and down and pounding Bill on the back.

"You see 'em, Bill?" he shouted. "You see 'em?"

"Yeah," said Bill, "I see." He stood looking out into the murky distance —half a mile—where the last of a great band of caribou were disappearing behind a low granite butte.

"There must be a thousand!" Doll Face exulted. He blew on his fingers, and whirled to re-enter the tent. "Come on, we got to get into our things. We'll miss this herd, but there'll be more. Plenty more. This country'll be lousy with caribou today. . . . And the caribou will be sure to bring wolves."

"I wondered if you were gonna forgit the wolves."

IN order to double the chance for contact with the caribou, Bill and Doll Face, upon leaving the tent, snowshoed off in opposite directions.

Bill made directly for a near whaleback. From the wind-swept summit he could look out in every direction. His pulse quickened, and his grip on the rifle tightened. Doll Face was right. The country *was* lousy with caribou!

Almost every shallow valley, for as far as he could see, sheltered a large or small band. The animals were all trotting stolidly eastward. For a long moment, he scanned the western horizon. Far off there against the sky—that dim black line— Was it *La Foule,* as the scattering of *Métis,* in this country termed the great seasonal throng of millions? Was it caribou, or just a low-lying streak of cloud?

Shrugging, he turned and commenced a hasty descent from the whaleback. He should be worrying about caribou miles away! His job was to put a bullet through the nearest animal he could find. Until he had a dead caribou at his feet, he wouldn't feel secure, though the whole country might be overrun with the brutes.

Near the foot of the slope he froze tense. A large buck with a magnificent sweep of antlers and a flowing white beard was swiftly approaching. At seventy yards he caught the scent. His tail went up. He wheeled and galloped.

Bill threw his rifle to shoulder, fired and missed. He had opportunity for only the single shot, before the buck's dash carried him behind the shelter of a head-high granite outcrop.

"Too anxious," he told himself, grimly. "I'll get the next one."

But as he racqueted along out of one shallow valley into another, he began to wonder if there would be a next one. Strange how many you could see from a hill top, and how few came within rifle range. Doll Face's gun hadn't sounded either. Doll Face was having no better luck than—

Bill stopped stone still. Rounding a high butte of glacial dump, a band of about twenty caribou came snorting and grunting in his direction. Unless it catches the scent, a caribou is slow to recognize danger in anything that does not move. The wind was right; the herd failed to strike the man-taint. On they came, closely skirting the rocky butte.

Bill let them get close, then opened up at fifty yards. *Boom—boom,* his heavy rifle spoke. With excited snorts, the band started milling. One young buck, hard hit, dashed blindly up the steep glacial slope. Two other caribou followed his lead. Loose rocks rolled in miniature avalanches from beneath their plunging hoofs.

*Boom—boom—boom!* Bill dropped all three. The carcasses slid a little way down the slope, disturbing more of the rounded glacial rocks, which trickled down the face of the butte, sending up little snow geysers to mark their serpentine path.

The rest of the band galloped away wildly in all directions. Bill let them go.

He kept his gun centered upon the three he had dropped, ready to add another bullet if it was needed.

When he saw that they did not struggle, he lowered his rifle and racqueted forward. He had to remove his webs to climb the steep slope. Even then, it was hard going, with the rocks slipping from under his feet at every step.

When he reached his great prize, he slumped down on one of the carcasses to rest. Shaking off his bear-skin mitt, he buried his hand under the long white mane. The animal warmth felt good to his hand. He relaxed. And now, at last, he exulted. Here was food! Not food running wild on the hoof, but food, secure, under his hand. Not wolf food—caribou food! The sweetest meat that man ever put in his mouth. Food so tasty as to make you want to eat your fingers. And enough, even if he shot no more, and

if Doll Face got none. Enough to last the two months until Jake came with the airplane.

Bill rested for only a little while. Then he pressed on again. Not far from the scene of his slaughter, he came upon a lone caribou. The animal had climbed a little knoll and was investigating a sprig of green pine which stuck out through the snow. With a single shot, Bill added this caribou to his collection and passed on, jubilant, stepping high.

As the undulating white hills unrolled, and no more caribou appeared within rifle shot, he breathed a sigh of profound thankfulness for those he had already taken. Once he grinned broadly as the sullen thunder of Doll Face's hard-hitting Winchester wafted from over the frozen tundra.

Doll Face had emptied his rifle. And the tough little man was a dead shot. He must have got several caribou out of that burst. Hey, man—happy days. No more wolf meat for a hundred years!

A little snow commenced powdering down from the leaden sky. As Bill slogged on, the fine snow persisted. He was on the point of calling it a day's hunt and turning back, when a large band of caribou galloped past at about 300 yards to the left. He could see them indistinctly against the murky background. Suddenly, the skies opened, a fierce snow squall beat down, and he could not see them at all.

He puzzled. The caribou's favorite gait, when not massed, was a steady 10-mile trot. They almost never galloped. Unless they were frightened. That was it; Doll Face's shots had scared 'em. Sure.

A little herd dashed madly past at less than 100 yards. Bill threw up his rifle, fired twice, saw one of the animals stumble and fall. As he started toward his kill, another large band burst dimly into view on his right. So close they passed that he could hear the click-clicking of their feet.

All at once he became conscious of another sound, a low menacing rumble, a throbbing as of a thousand muffled drums, which seemed to swell and swell until the air quivered and the ground trembled under his feet.

In quick alarm, he looked behind him, straining his eyes to penetrate the close-pressing curtain of snow. Even as he turned, a dark onrushing mass broke through the snow curtain and bore down on him at frightful speed.

He half raised his rifle. Then, like a knife, the thought struck: "It's going to take more than a few bullets to turn these stampeding brutes! Bill Cagle, you better step to one side—now!"

From out of the tail of his eye, he cast a quick glance to right and left. He chilled. He couldn't step aside. There was nowhere to step! In each direction there loomed a solid massed line of oncharging caribou. Impossible to evade these thousands of hoofed juggernauts stampeded by Doll Face's bullets!

For a split second Bill stood rooted, as in a nightmare dream. Then, lurching around, he ran on his snowshoes, like a great clumsy hawk. Ran as he had never run in his life. He headed for a near granite outcrop, while behind him the herd thundered.

His objective, one of those narrow wind-swept ridges peculiar to the locality, was not far distant; but neither was that trampling death far behind. Just once he looked back. He let his rifle drop, then, and put every last ounce of strength into those running legs. Closer loomed the granite haven, and closer pounded the galloping multitude. Individual caribou, flying a little ahead of the packed herd, commenced to stream by him.

With the trampling roar rising to a savage crescendo, he reached the foot of the granite ridge. He didn't stop to kick off his snowshoes. Down on all fours, clambering, lunging up that steep slope, he duplicated very

closely the efforts of those three caribou which had attempted to escape his bullets by climbing the glacial dump.

There was this important difference: that while the three caribou lost in their fight for life, Bill, in his fight, won.

In utter exhaustion, he slumped on a shelving rock a dozen feet above the ground and fainted dead away. The vanguard of the caribou horde swept past in a mighty wave.

WHEN Bill regained consciousness, he lay for a moment, aware of a muffled roaring in his ears. He sat up weakly and looked around. There was no snow in the air now. His eyes widened with awe.

On every side of the narrow ridge, front, back, right, and left, as far as the eye could see, was a moving, surging mass of caribou. *La Foule* was here at last.

For a while it amused him to watch the spectacle. Snorts and grunts, antler clackings and hoof tramplings, welled up in one mighty synchronized roar, as the caribou flowed on and on and on. He watched until he became dizzy from watching, until it seemed that his rocky ridge was a boat, and the caribou horde flooding over the rolling hills was the water. And the boat moved forward smoothly, magnificently, without the need of steering, while the sea of caribou stood still, gently undulating.

He chuckled suddenly. "I wanted caribou; I got 'em. Talk about your water everywhere and not a drop to drink—I'm in the middle of a billion caribou steaks, and I'm hungry and haven't got nothin' to eat!"

All at once he quit chuckling. A trembling seized upon him, and his face grew white with a monstrous fear. After a while he talked to himself again, the words issuing from his lips with slow deadly emphasis.

"This," he said, "is the fifth day that I have gone without food. *La Foule* has been known to take six days in passing. If this band of caribou takes six days—if I am stuck up on this rock for six days—six and five are eleven—that will be eleven days without food—eleven days— *I will be dead.*"

All that day the earth trembled to the tramp of the caribou. All that day and all that night and all the next day. Bill found himself facing the second night with his strength fast failing, his hope fast ebbing.

And yet he did not altogether give up hope. It was so late in the season for caribou to be migrating. Wasn't it reasonable to suppose that the main herd had already gone south, perhaps weeks before, and that this was merely the rear guard? A scrubby million or so that would pass in a day or two?

The previous night had been so cold that he had feared to sleep. Tonight was much warmer. His clothes were heavy enough to keep him from freezing. He decided to sleep.

"Hell," he muttered, "cold or warm, I couldn't keep awake anyhow."

He dozed off. When he awakened, it was broad daylight.

*And not a caribou in sight!*

BILL spent no time in investigating his last kill. The carcass, he knew, would be trampled to nothing. His rifle also—ground to bits.

But his second kill—the caribou he had dropped on top of the knoll—would be saved from those destroying hoofs, just as he, himself, had been saved. As quickly as he could, weakened from starvation and exposure, he made his way toward that knoll. He lurched a little, and stumbled often, but he managed to keep his feet.

Thoughts of Doll Face crowded his mind. But he didn't actually worry about his partner. He couldn't imagine the wiry little roughneck being run down by a caribou. No, Doll Face must be back at the camp, living high.

The stone breastworks which they had erected about the tent would have preserved their camp in case the caribou herd had overrun that locality.

As he neared the knoll, Bill quickened his pace. His heart beat faster. But after he climbed the knoll, his heart, for a moment, quit beating altogether.

There was only a blood-stained mess of paw-trampled snow to show where the carcass had been. The wolves, which follow in the wake of the caribou hordes had very wisely been here before him.

Bill turned away grimly. He had one more chance. The three caribou which he had shot on the glacial dump —they were high enough up to have escaped being trampled. And *maybe* they had not been found by the wolves.

Geared up by hope, Bill staggered along. Several times he stumbled and fell, but he always got up promptly. He reached the rocky drift and stood swaying. He passed his hand over his eyes and shook his head sharply. Something here he could not understand. This was the right place. And yet—it was different.

Suddenly, he did understand. The wolves had not been here, no—but the trampling of a million hoofs had shaken the loose rocks—the whole side of the hill had slid down! The caribou carcasses were buried so deep they could never be dug out all winter!

Things went black for Bill. But only for a moment. With iron will, he lashed his failing muscles, saved himself from falling. Lunging around, he drove his tortured body on again—on toward camp. He walked in zigzags, lurching and staggering. But he walked. He wanted to get down on his hands and knees and crawl. But he wouldn't. He'd reach camp, and he'd reach it walking.

Everything depended upon Doll Face now. Doll Face had shot caribou. That much was certain. Never yet had the hard-boiled little man shot away a whole clip of cartridges without bringing something down. But whether his partner had been marooned, too, and had lost his meat—

Bill tried to quit thinking about it. He'd find out soon enough.

Eventually, he sighted the camp. There had been many falls in the meantime, but no crawling. He was weaving, but still up on his hind legs when Doll Face came running from the camp to meet him.

A delirious joy coursed over Bill. Doll Face—running. Running! If he had strength to run, then he had been eating. He had managed to save his caribou! Food!

"I heard your shots," Bill blurted, as Doll Face threw a supporting arm around him. "How many caribou did you get?"

Doll Face looked frightened. "Bill," he said, haltingly, "I've been dependin' on you. I didn't get any!"

"Huh?" Bill's blood-shot eyes stared wildly.

"You see," Doll Face said gently, "I didn't get no chance at the caribou, Bill, cause I busted my rifle. Busted it over the back of a wolf that was comin' at me."

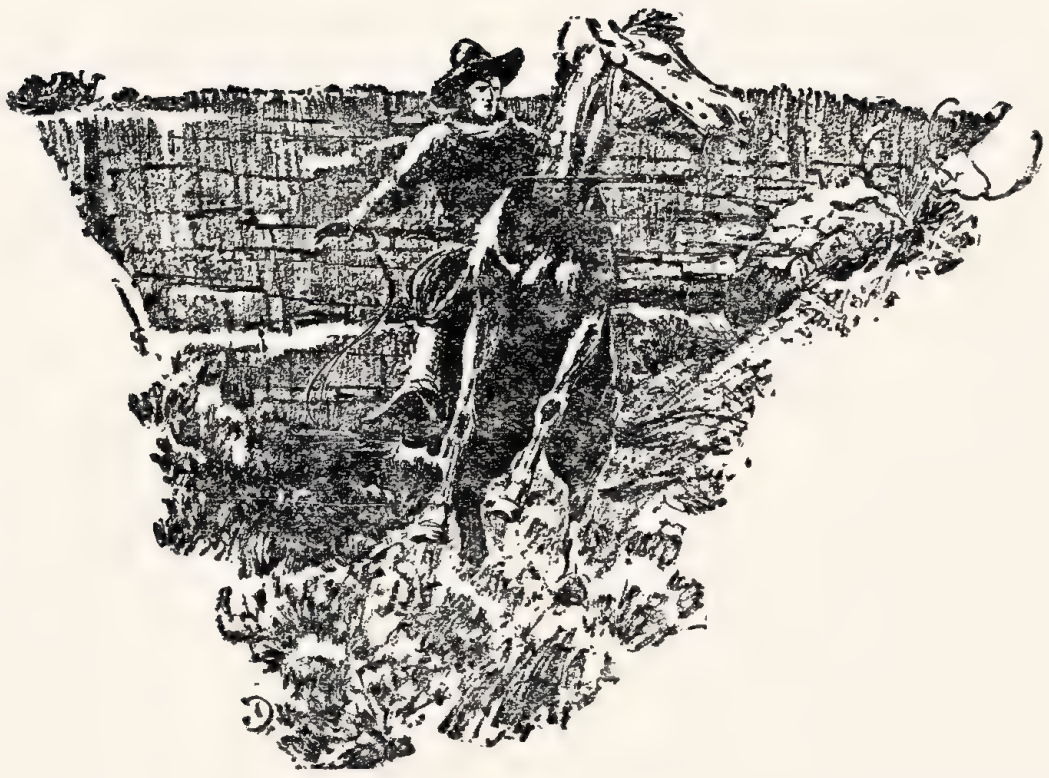
"But I heard you shoot," Bill muttered thickly. "I heard you shoot. You must of killed somethin'—"

"Yeah—wolves."

"Wolves!"

"Yeah. You see, I heard you bangin' away, too. I figured you'd killed all the caribou we could use. So when I ran into a pack of wolves—well, naturally—"

Bill gulped weakly. "Bring on the wolf," he said.



# *HELL'S HUNDRED*

*By Hal Leslie*

**Glenn Rogers, a sturdy fellow, not over twenty, faced almost impossible odds. Unarmed, outnumbered, cornered, his plight was desperate. But there was a smoldering fire of vengeance in his heart and a mountain of strength in his body. He had no scruples about killing these murderous snakes who rode him; he needed only a break. . . .**

BIG Mac Slade—better known throughout the Red Canyon country as "Black Mac"—shoved the ugly muzzle of his forty-five hard against young Glenn Rogers' flat midriff.

"I ain't foolin' whatever!" he snarled wolfishly. "Out with it, now—and come clean!"

Under the high moon the one street of Los Astros town was a still river of silver sand. But beneath the roofed porch of the Oxbow Saloon, where four men stood, darkness lay like a faintly luminous smear of deep purple.

Inside the Oxbow there was light, rough hilarity, and the hard clack of poker chips on wooden tables. But the street was deserted. Only the score of saddled horses drowsing at the big saloon's long hitch-rail were dumb witness to the drama of hot greed and cool defiance going forward on the shadowed porch.

A wash of light from a nearby window struck faintly upon Black Mac's swarthy, bearded face. His beady eyes were glittering like the eyes of a snake.

"Out with it!" he repeated savagely. "Come clean, or I'll bust you wide open!"

Glenn Rogers, a shade under nineteen but built sturdy as a young oak, knew that he was in a tight fix. His

back was hard against the rough 'dobe wall of the saloon, and his hands were high. But he didn't crack. His level gaze locked with Black Mac's, disregarding the two other men flanking Black Mac with eager hands hovering at their gun butts.

"Go ahead and bust me," he said gamely. "You'll never get what you want from me!"

Anger swept like the shadow of a buzzard's wing across Black Mac's face.

"All right, then—keep yore mouth shut, if that's th' way you want it! But keep it shut good and tight! One yip outa you and I'm thumbin' th' hammer. . . . Clem," he snapped curtly to one of his hard-bitten henchmen, "you snag this jasper's irons. We'll take him out on th' mesa and *make* him talk!"

"*Seguro,*" grunted Clem.

But before he could move to carry out Black Mac's order, the door of the Oxbow opened from within and a finger of yellow light stabbed out across the porch. A gaunt man with a grizzled beard and rugged physique was for a moment silhouetted against the smoky glow as he emerged from the doorway.

"Dad!"

Glenn's cry was sharp and clear. It brought the gaunt man to an abrupt halt. His head swung and his searching gaze picked out the group in the shadows. With three long strides he was among them.

Black Mac's lip twisted, and with a quick, furtive move he threw his iron home in its holster. His two companions gave back an uneasy pace.

Glenn's arms dropped, and the right hand swept hotly toward his gun. Rand Rogers stayed the move with a quiet word.

"Easy, boy. . . . Keep yore shirt on." He swung to the three men. "What's going on here?" he demanded evenly.

"We was only funnin'," muttered Black Mac. "Just throwin' a little scare into him."

"Yeah!" said Glenn icily. "Throwing a gun into my belly! If you call that funnin', you polecat—"

Black Mac's snarl cut him short. He surged close with fist doubled. Rebellion at the epithet overrode for the moment his innate cowardice.

But whatever he meant to do wasn't accomplished. With a backhand sweep of his long arm, Rand Rogers caught him flush on the mouth with the heel of his gaunt hand and sent him reeling backward a pace. And it was mute testimony to the well-known prowess of old Rand Rogers' gun hand that neither Black Mac nor his two henchmen made any move to draw an iron.

Muttering sullenly, like the ominous whispering of thunder over far hills, Black Mac stalked down off the porch, unhitched his blaze-faced sorrel, and climbed leather. His two companions followed suit. Then the three rode briskly out of town.

Side by side, Glenn and his father watched them go. . . .

"What was that sidewinder's play, son?" asked old Rand curiously. "He looked considerable like a coyote what's been drove away from fresh meat."

"And I reckon he feels like one, too," said Glenn grimly. . . . And after a moment: "He saw you paying off for our grub and stuff with that dust, over to the store. I saw him watching you tilt your poke—and I had sort of a hunch that meant trouble in the wind. It come quicker'n I expected. Him and his two sidewinders was waiting here in the shadows for me. They backed me 'gainst the wall before I had a chance to draw."

"So," observed old Rand thoughtfully. "Figgered yuh also had a poke on yuh. That what they was after?"

"No. They figured we'd made a strike, somewhere. Black Mac aimed to find out where. Aimed to wangle it outa me."

"Hell!" exclaimed old Rand sharply. "Yuh didn't—"

"You bet I didn't," interrupted Glenn. "Black Mac coulda salivated me and I'd never yipped!"

Old Rand nodded with grim satisfaction. "I needn't have asked yuh that question, son," he said gently. "Yuh feelin' th' need of a little drink afore we hit leather?"

Glenn shook his head. "Not whatever. But I'm taking a pasear down to the store after a few more forty-fours for my rifle. They might come in handy."

Old Rand shrugged. "I don't reckon Black Mac an' his gang will press us any," he said quietly. "He's yellower'n a skunk's belly."

"Give a skunk the smell of an aig and he'll try to suck it," said Glenn soberly. "I'm getting them ca'tridges."

Old Rand thoughtfully curled a cigarette and watched the sturdy youngster swing off down the street toward the general store. The flare of the match as Rand lit his smoke revealed a gleam of pride in his steady, steel-blue eyes—eyes that he could have swapped for his son's eyes and no man would have been able to tell the difference.

Glenn, a grim set to his lips, shortly returned from the store with his pockets heavy with cartridges. His paint pony and old Rand's roan were at the Oxbow hitch-rail, saddle bags bulging with provisions. Rand snapped away the butt of his cigarette and joined Glenn there. And the two mounted and rode out of town.

Once clear, they swung westward across the treeless mesa. They rode in silence under the high moon toward the far-lying Hell's Hundred that was their destination.

THE sun rose, red as blood and as the breath of a dragon.

Glenn and Rand were weaving steadily out into Hell's Hundred—a vast domain of crag and canyon, butte and pinnacle, sand, lava outcrop, and salt flats that gleamed and shimmered until the eye ached from looking at them. A grim and forbidding land, and a man would have had to ride three days to circle it.

It was old Rand's eye that happened to catch, at mid-forenoon, the thin bloom of dust rising far back on the trail. He directed Glenn's attention that way and the two drew rein and considered.

"Comin' along at a right smart jog, figgerin' the heat," observed old Rand calmly.

"Black Mac!" exclaimed Glenn impulsively. "I'll bet!"

"Maybe so," agreed Rand soberly. "But no three hawsses are makin' *that* smoke. If'n it's Black Mac, he's shore ridin' with plenty company."

"Plenty company is about his size of guts," commented Glenn sourly. "Anyways near an even game to buck, and his tail goes up like a scared antelope's. Like last night."

Old Rand nodded in grim confirmation of Glenn's terse appraisal of Black Mac's brand of courage. His eyes wrinkled against the distance.

"Shore looks like they're a-trailin' us—whoever they be," he said. "Shouldn't wonder but what yuh called th' turn last night, at that."

"I'll find out," said Glenn promptly. And he slid off his pinto and scrambled to the crest of a nearby hogback. And there he stood like a figure in bronze, immobile, watching while the dust bloom advanced and grew.

Old Rand curled a cigarette and waited. . . . Glenn came down off his perch with hard lines about his mouth.

"It's him," he said laconically. "I made out his blaze-face in the lead. There's a dozen or so riders with him."

"Looks like he done collected his whole gang for th' party," grunted old Rand.

"He'll run into a party he ain't expecting," said Glenn savagely, pulling at his rifle in the saddle sheath. "We'll hunt a likely rock and smoke 'em a few!"

"No," said old Rand quickly. "That don't sound."

"Why not?" demanded Glenn. "If he aims to jump our prospect, he's shore got lead coming to him!"

"He's got to find it afore he can jump it," said old Rand quietly. "That's what he likely aims to do—track us down. Or else get hold of us an' try to wangle it outa us. If we put our backs up now, all he'd do is surround us with his gang an' maybe throw a little long lead to keep our heads down. He'd dry us out until we rattle. . . . No, son, we cain't afford to hole up for him."

The logic of this argument cooled Glenn's hot blood a bit. "What we going to do?" he asked.

"Well—I ain't one to dodge trouble when it comes up an' spits in my eye. But this is one time I figger it's best not to let it get within spittin' distance."

"You mean we'd better try to outfox 'em? Try to lose 'em?"

"Sounds reasonable, don't it, son?"

Glenn nodded and let his half-drawn rifle slide back into its sheath. "We'd better be moving," he said tersely.

They struck off at a tangent in the broken country. Threading arroyos, skirting outcrops and hogbacks, winding and twisting, taking advantage of every bit of ground that seemed likely not to take the hoofprints of their horses, they worked a wide curve back and away from their previous trail.

At the end of two hours of steady riding, Glenn climbed a pinnacle and scanned the back trail. There was no dust, but his keen vision detected a sun-flash that he suspected came from a bridle's silver trim. And a few moments later he spotted a rider or two.

"They're a-coming," he said grimly as he rejoined his father. "Evident they've fanned out, and they're smelling us out like a pack of hounds."

Rock-jawed old Rand led off at another tangent, driving deeper into the grim heart of Hell's Hundred. Glenn guessed, and rightly, that his father's object was to prevent any of the spread-out gang from heading them.

The game went on. . . . Occasionally Glenn climbed to some vantage point and surveyed the surrounding terrain. Sometimes he caught a fleeting glimpse of some moving object in the distance. More often he saw nothing.

The sun swung low. Sweat began to dry and cake on the two tired horses. For a long time there had been not the slightest sign of pursuit along the back trail.

Rand was ahead, Glenn riding a few paces behind. They were headed toward the mouth of a draw, some three hundred yards away, where aspens grew thickly and where there was a tiny spring that would freshen their tired horses.

Rand drew rein, turned in the saddle and scanned the back trail. Glenn looked that way, too.

"No sign, Dad," he said. "I reckon we've—"

He was interrupted by a queer, coughing grunt from Rand's roan—quickly followed by the echoing crack of a rifle.

Glenn jerked his head around sharply, saw the roan crumpling. Old Rand made a valiant effort to clear himself; but the spryness of youth was no longer in him, and he was caught fairly under the fall of his horse, one long leg twisted beneath.

Glenn was off his pinto like a cat, tugging at his father's shoulders. He pulled him clear just as a bunch of wild riders came barging out from the mouth of the distant draw.

Old Rand tried to get up—fell back with a repressed groan. "My ankle—plumb twisted outa shape, son," he said quietly.

"We'll ride double!" cried Glenn, and stooped to lift the stricken man. "Damn their hearts!"

But old Rand reached up a long arm and shoved him away, almost savagely. "We'd never make it, son. Not

double. Fork yore hawss an' drift—pronto!"

"I ain't leaving you, Dad!"

"Got to!" asserted old Rand tersely. "They'd get us both if we burden yore pinto thataway!"

"I'm staying!" declared Glenn. He lunged for his sheathed rifle, jerked the weapon free, turned—and found himself looking down into the unwavering round muzzle of his father's six-gun. . . .

"Dad!"

"Hit leather!" Old Rand's voice was hard and brittle. "Get yoreself away alive and you'll have a chance at Black Mac. . . . What are yuh waitin' for! . . . Damn yuh! get goin' —or I'll shore salivate yuh!"

Glenn choked. He looked at the rapidly approaching riders; looked at his father. Old Rand's face was like granite, but he couldn't keep his eyes like that. Yet, there was no mistaking his determination. . . .

Glenn knew that his father was right, knew that the only chance to get Black Mac was to try to make a getaway now. He realized, too, that his father was sending him away because he loved him. . . . He stooped swiftly. Their hands met in a fierce, hard grip. Then, with blurred eyes, he leaped into his leather and gave the pinto steel.

Looking back, he saw his father, belly down, coolly throwing lead at the oncoming riders. A horse reared; a man fell. Glenn twisted in the saddle and began to work the lever of his rifle.

A horse went down, its rider somersaulting. Another man sagged in the saddle. And the rifles of Black Mac's gang began to bark. Lead whined around Glenn's ears.

Cursing, he bent low and roweled the pinto. Over his shoulder he saw four riders coming after him, hotfoot. The others had piled off where lay Rand Rogers and his dead roan.

The pinto crashed through a mesquite thicket and a moment later was throwing sand along a wide arroyo.... Glenn drew rein after rounding a bend and listened. He heard no hoofbeats following.

He dismounted, left his horse blowing, spread-legged, with trailed reins. He scrambled up the slope of the arroyo to the crest of a low ridge. He saw smoke, back there where his father had fallen, and a dark huddle of men around a newly-kindled fire. He knew full well what that portended. A hot cinch ring, or a rustler's running iron. . . .

Half-blind with rage, he ran back to his horse, flung himself savagely into saddle, and rode pounding back down the arroyo. He had no thought of anything except to reach his father. . . .

Snorting, blowing, wild-eyed, the pinto crashed through the mesquite. And just as it came clear, Glenn felt himself jerked violently from the saddle. He hit the ground at the end of thirty feet of taut rawhide with a thud that all but knocked him senseless.

Before he could make a move, three men were on him. They disarmed him and hauled him roughly to his feet, then tied his hands behind him with an end of the riata.

His pinto had halted when he fell. They boosted him into his own saddle. With one leading the horse, another riding alongside with a dally of the riata around his saddle horn, and the third bringing up the rear with a drawn six-gun at Glenn's back, they herded him along to the spot where he had begun his fight.

Glenn went white when he saw what was going forward there. He mouthed an inarticulate cry and tried to throw himself from the saddle. But two men held him with iron hands, and the third jabbed the muzzle of his gun sharply between his shoulder blades.

Black Mac was hunkered down at the fire, where a running iron was heating. Nearby, four men were hold-

ing old Rand, spread-eagled on his back. They had torn his vest and shirt away. And across his bare chest showed long red welts. His gaunt face was contorted with agony, but his jaw was clamped tight as a steel trap.

Big Mac looked up. His face was an ugly mask.

"Yank that young squirt off his horse, Clem, and lay him out!" he ordered with a snarl. "I reckon *he'll* talk!"

Glenn's captors hauled him roughly off his horse. He started to curse Black Mac, but a savage blow from Clem's knotted fist drove the words back between his teeth and sent him crashing backward, dazed and limp.

Black Mac plucked the running iron from the fire. It glowed red and angry in the thickening dusk. Black Mac lunged to his feet and started menacingly for Glenn.

"Stop!" Old Rand's voice rang out sharp and clear. "Lay off that boy, Slade! I'm talkin'."

Black Mac wheeled, evil triumph on his face. "Talk, then!" he snapped. "And talk straight!"

"Don't you do it, Dad!" cried Glenn thickly through bruised lips. "Don't you tell him! Let the yellow-bellied skunk do his damnedest—I'll never squeal!"

Old Rand twisted his head and looked over at Glenn. In Rand's eyes appeared the same expression that they had held when he'd ordered Glenn to flee. Glenn was all he had. For ten years he'd been mother and father to the boy. Had watched him grow into the edge of manhood, strong and clean as a die, and afraid of no man that walked. Ever since Glenn had been big enough to fork a horse, they'd ridden trail together. Hard years and better ones. Punching cows. Putting horn on their palms from the handles of picks and shovels. Sharing beans and flapjacks beside many a lonely campfire. Until, just a month ago, they'd found their first real prospect. . . And now—

"It's all right, son," he said quietly. "Gold don't matter whatever. . . . Slade, I'm givin' yuh my location—on one condition."

"Name it," snapped Black Mac.

"That yuh keep yore hands off my boy—an' let him go."

"You ain't got no fret on that score," said Black Mac quickly. "If you talk straight, I'm releasin' both of you. But if you try to run a blazer on me—well, that boy of your'n is due for a damn' sight worse dose than I've give you! Savvy?"

Old Rand nodded. "I aim to come clean, Slade," he said evenly.

And he did.

Despite Glenn's protests, he gave Black Mac true and detailed directions as to where to find the gold prospect. He would have done anything to save Glenn from Black Mac's torturing hands.

And when old Rand was done, Black Mac grinned evilly and said: "I'm a man of my word, Rogers. I'm *releasin'* you, right now."

And with that, he calmly drew his gun and shot old Rand Rogers dead where he lay. . . .

WITH the first faint break of true dawn, Black Mac and his ruffians were on the move. Black Mac himself rode ahead, with a leather-faced hombre called Dave beside him. Behind these two rode Glenn Rogers, under the watchful eye of the red-bearded giant, Clem. The rest of the bunch, seven hard-bitten riders—one of them with his arm in a sling—brought up the rear. Ten ruthless men bound for bloody gold. . . .

Glenn was atop his own pinto. His ankles were roped together under the brute's belly, his hands snagged tight to the saddle horn. His face was curiously hard. That twilight tragedy and the long, long night while he lay thinking, thinking, had done something to Glenn Rogers. It had tempered him as steel is tempered in a fire. He was no longer a youth on

the edge of manhood; he was a man —hard, alert, dangerous. . . . And the burden of his thoughts, as he rode with cold eyes boring into the back of the man who had killed his father, was vengeance. . . .

At high noon the cavalcade turned into the mouth of the box canyon where Glenn and his father had made their strike. And a couple of miles up-canyon they came upon the series of prospect holes that zigzagged up a hard gravel slope toward the base of a grim cliff that probably housed the mother lode.

A little way beyond, beside the flow of a small spring, lay a great heap of raw gravel which the two had laboriously carried from the prospect holes to wash for colors. The spring flow supported a small area of grass before it was sucked dry by the sands of the canyon floor. Nearby was one lone cottonwood tree, and beneath it stood a weathered tent.

Black Mac surveyed the prospect holes with appreciative satisfaction.

"Must be good, boys," he observed. "Must promise a neat lode—to make a man keep a shut mouth under hot iron, th' way I laid it on—"

"Damn you!" cried Glenn, white-lipped. He surged wildly against his bonds. "If I could get a hand on you I'd fix you for what you done to my dad!"

Black Mac sneered. Then with a lightning fast move, he drew his gun. "One of them holes will make a right nice place to bury you!" he said. And with slow deliberation he lifted the muzzle of the gun until it was pointed squarely at Glenn's midriff.

Glenn stiffened to meet the expected shock of the slug, but it didn't come. . . . And after a long moment, Black Mac laughed harshly and chocked the weapon home in its holster.

"Too soon," he said. "No use of us blisterin' our hands, boys, when there's a healthy young jasper like this one to hunt th' lode for us. Put him in that top hole an' throw him a shovel! And Clem, you set up there with yore Winchester an' see that he don't lay down on th' job!"

The sun was hellish. It spilled liquid fire on Glenn's bent back as he toiled in the last prospect hole that he and his father had started. Clem kept him at it under the muzzle of a thirty-thirty. And Glenn worked, his jaw tight and curiously suggestive of old Rand's. If the odds were not quite so great . . .

Black Mac and the rest of his ruffians lazed in the tent and in the shade of the cottonwood, curling cigarettes, talking, napping.

At mid-afternoon the guard was changed. And a couple of hours later Black Mac set Glenn to carting the dug gravel to the spring flow and to panning it there.

No colors showed. Black Mac cursed and put him at digging another hole, at an angle up the slope. He kept Glenn at it until it was too dark to swing a shovel.

They fed him a supper of scraps, like a dog, and then trussed him securely for the night. . . .

Another day of muscle-cracking toil lay ahead.

At mid-forenoon Black Mac came and stood on the edge of the hole. Glen leaned on his shovel and addressed the surly gang leader.

"You ain't in any great hurry to snag that lode, are you?"

"Meanin' what?" snapped Black Mac.

"Meaning, if I was in your place, I'd get what I was after as quick as I could," said Glenn calmly, "before somebody happens along and puts a crimp in th' game."

Black Mac sneered. "Tired diggin'?"

"Not whatever," asserted Glenn. "I ain't never tired until I've finished what I start. But I figure a stick of dynamite now and again would be some quicker'n a shovel. You're going to need it, anyway, when you get up under th' cliff at th' top of th' slope,

where I reckon th' lode is hiding. That's th' way me and dad figured it—and we aimed to pack a load of dynamite out from Los Astros, next trip we made. If you an' your damn' buzzards—"

"Shut yore mouth an' lay onto that shovel handle!" snapped Black Mac.

Glenn fell to work silently. Black Mac turned and walked away, but his sour visage was thoughtful. . . . And half an hour later he was back.

"Sam," he said to the guard, "me and some of th' boys are goin' in to Los Astros. We need grub, an' maybe I might bring back some dynamite. We'll show up around sundown tomorrow. I'm leavin' you an' Clem an' Dave to keep this jasper workin'. Start him on another hole in th' mawnin'."

"Right," grinned Sam. "He'll dig."

At the heel of the afternoon, Clem put Glenn to washing gravel. Dave and Sam were napping in the tent. A few flakes of color showed in Glenn's pan, then finally a nugget about the size of a lima bean. Clem pocketed the nugget avidly, with a grunt of satisfaction. And he didn't reveal the find to his two fellow ruffians.

Next morning, at the start of a new prospect hole, Glenn cocked an eye up at the base of the cliff and probed Clem with a tentative word.

"Have to strike a whale of a lode, I reckon, for *you* to get much outa this deal."

Suspicion flowed over Clem's heavy features. "What yo' drivin' at?" he demanded.

"Figure it out yourself. A nine-way split, after Black Mac takes his cut, likely won't be much. . . ." Glenn looked significantly toward the tent, where Sam and Dave were cleaning up the breakfast dishes. "How about you an' me talking turkey?" he suggested. "We can—"

Clem scowled and cut him short by jabbing the muzzle of his rifle into his ribs. "Get goin' with that shovel!"

The sun rolled high, lancing Glenn's bent back with shafts of fire. Clem swore at the heat and called Sam up from the shade of the cottonwood to stand guard a spell.

Black Mac had fallen for Glenn's suggestion about the dynamite and posted off to Los Astros with six of his men. But what of it, Glenn reflected bitterly. The odds were reduced, all right, to a fighting chance—if he could only get a chance to fight. . . .

The hole deepened, slowly. Dave took a turn with the Winchester. And shortly after mid-afternoon Clem relieved Dave.

The sun crawled lower. The hole was deeper than Glenn's height now; its rim was more than a foot above his head. Clem was sitting aside, out of sight, but his head and shoulders were shadowed on the east rim.

Glenn's eyes began to speculate on that shadow. It would be near time, now, for Black Mac and his crowd to return. God! if only he had a gun! . . .

Suddenly Glenn's eyes narrowed. He turned his back on the east rim and Clem's shadow there, and his shovel began to fly. He worked with guarded intensity, lest too greatly increased activity should arouse Clem's curiosity.

The trap was set. Glenn put down his shovel and picked up a pebble. "Holy smoke!" he exclaimed—and his simulation of surprise and exultation was perfect. He whistled with evident amazement.

The shadow came to quick life. Clem bellied down at the edge of the hole. His heavy, inquiring face appeared there beside the outthrust barrel of his Winchester.

"What yo' found?" he demanded.

"A nugget—big as a road-runner's aig!" said Glenn.

"Hand it over!" growled Clem.

Glenn clutched the pebble defensively. "You've got one," he said. "I'm keeping this one myself."

"Th' hell yo 'are! Hand it over, I say!"

Glenn shrugged hopelessly. He lifted his hand slowly, reluctantly. Clem's cupidity made him reach farther down with his grimy paw. The move brought his weight nearer the edge of the hole. . . . With a sudden crumbling, the deep undercut that Glenn had made there gave way. Into the hole Clem fell headlong, rifle and all, too surprised to cry out.

He hit the bottom on his face, squirmed, spat gravel, and clawed wildly for his six-gun. Glenn's shovel suddenly came down, a whistling streak, and cracked his skull like an egg.

With swift, sure fingers Glenn transferred the dead man's gunbelt and forty-five to his own lean waist. He picked up the rifle and thumped its barrel free of sand. Then he listened breathlessly. . . .

There was no sound from the camp. Evidently the ill-fated Clem's disaster had not been observed. Glenn braced the shovel, stood on it, and cautiously reconnoitered.

There was no sign of either Sam or Dave. Evidently they were in the tent. Certainly they had not left the vicinity of the camp, for their horses, along with Clem's mount and Glenn's own pinto, were hobbled on the short grass beyond the tent.

Cautiously Glenn climbed out of the hole. And a moment later he was sheltered in another, farther down the slope. A shallower hole, only shoulder deep.

He didn't delay action. He sent a searching bullet from the rifle ripping into the tent, low. It brought immediate results in the shape of a wild yell of pain and a sudden commotion. Sam staggered dazedly into view, cursing, one arm limp, the other stabbing at his holster. Glenn laid him down with a thirty-thirty slug through the head.

Glenn saw Dave snaking swiftly along the ground from the rear of the tent toward the bole of the cottonwood. The rifle cracked again. One of Dave's legs jerked convulsively; then, by a prodigious effort, he gained shelter behind the tree. A moment later a slug from his six-gun kicked gravel into Glenn's tense face.

Glenn ducked. Evidently Dave wasn't hit badly enough to prevent him from being a very lively menace. Glenn proved it by thrusting the crown of his Stetson above the rim of the hole and getting a neat vent through the crown.

Although Glenn had a rifle, the advantage of location was Dave's. Glenn's head was down and Dave was alert. Glenn cursed softly. It looked as if he'd have to stay holed up until Black Mac and his gang arrived to surround and finish him off. . . .

Suddenly a grim, humorless twist showed on his lips. Why the devil hadn't he thought of it before! Why hadn't he remembered that there was a hornets' nest high up among the branches of the cottonwood! He backed against the far side of the hole, slowly rose. The topmost branches of the tree came into view, then more of them. And finally he saw it—a gray blur among the green.

His first shot tore half the nest away. His second severed the small limb supporting it. It fell to the ground.

A moment later he heard Dave yell. He rose swiftly, saw the man floundering away from the trunk of the tree, beating frantically at his head with both hands, oblivious to everything except the angered hornets that were swarming round him. Glenn's rifle cracked, and Dave was suddenly still.

Glenn wasted no time. This was a box canyon, and he knew that he'd have to get out before Black Mac and his returning riders should reach the mouth. Glenn scrambled out of the hole and ran to the tent.

He found there his own six-gun, which he belted on along with Clem's.

His own saddle gun was nowhere to be seen, but he still had the thirty-thirty. And he was lucky enough to find an unopened box of twenty cartridges for this weapon.

A hasty search of the dead Clem's pockets yielded half a dozen more cartridges. He thought of annexing Dave's six-gun, and Sam's. But he decided against it; he had weight enough to carry. Only two things more he took from the dead—a sack of tobacco and a handful of matches.

He wanted a smoke like the very devil, but he didn't pause to roll a cigarette. He gathered up his saddle, which lay with the three others beneath the cottonwood, and ran for his pinto. He screwed down the rigging hurriedly. But before he mounted, he freed the three hobbled horses and started them high-tailing up the canyon; if anything should possibly happen to delay or prevent the return of the bandits, he didn't want good horseflesh to be left hobbled out in that desolation.

He little suspected, as he swung into leather and went pounding down the canyon, that his bit of thoughtfulness for dumb brutes was destined to figure tremendously in the happenings of the hours to come.

GLENN was half a mile or so from the mouth of the canyon, traversing a long bottle-neck where the walls on either hand rose bleak and sheer from a litter of gigantic fragments of fallen rimrock, when fate slipped a tight cork in the bottle.

From around a shoulder of the canyon wall, some four hundred yards away, Black Mac and his men appeared. Riding leisurely, they hazed a loaded pack horse ahead of them.

They spotted Glenn at the same moment he discovered them. Glenn drew his pinto to a desperate sliding stop. And with a collective yell that carried deadly menace up along the intervening stretch of blue dusk, the ruffians quickened their horses.

Glenn realized that he was bottled for fair, knew that there was no going forward or retreating. Thought and action went hand in hand; he kneed the pinto sharply to the left and sunk a smart rowel.

In three startled leaps the pinto was among the sandstone fragments. And two more jumps carried horse and rider behind a great boulder that was big enough to shelter both. Glenn tossed the reins and hit the ground with rifle at full cock. And a moment later the canyon was re-echoing to the spiteful bark of the thirty-thirty.

Glenn's hasty shooting from behind his solid rampart wrought no particular damage. But it had the result he had hoped for; it checked the charge of Black Mac and his riders before it was fairly under way.

One horse went down, throwing the bunch into confusion. Its rider extricated himself from tangled leather and ran for shelter behind a nearby rock. He made it safely and plunged out of sight. His companions, yelling imprecations, scattered to either flank of the canyon and took the handiest cover. Within ten seconds not a man was visible—nor any horse, except the dead one and the pack animal.

This pack brute, startled by the blended roaring of guns that broke out behind it, took panic and came pounding on alone. Glenn, crouching behind his boulder where lead was spattering viciously, saw the frightened animal, nostrils flaring, snorting alarm, go tearing past to disappear up-canyon.

For a couple of minutes the firing was hot and furious. Glenn made no effort to reply. He assured himself that his pinto was at a safe stand, then lay low with a grim twist to his lips. And as he broke out the fresh box of cartridges and refilled the magazine of the thirty-thirty, he gave sober thought to his situation.

The words of his father when they had first spotted Black Mac on their trail and Glenn had wanted to take

cover and do battle, came back to him now: ". . . maybe throw a little long lead to keep our heads down . . . dry us out until we rattle. . . ."

Well, here he was in just that predicament. But at least he had enough lead to make things interesting for Black Mac and his men before their odds of six to one must finally overwhelm him.

When the firing eased off, Glenn chanced a quick look down the canyon. He saw nothing except the dead horse. But some alert bandit spotted him and sent a rifle bullet winging up through the deepening dusk to kick stinging particles of rock dust into his face. He managed to turn loose a couple of retaliatory shots before a second fusillade forced him to duck hurriedly.

As dusk deepened it became apparent to Glenn that Black Mac didn't intend to starve or dry him out. A light wind was moving up-canyon and it brought sounds to Glenn's ears: the clash of a rifle barrel on stone, the roll of a rock, a harsh voice, the words indistinguishable. Black Mac and his men were moving in, stealthily shortening the distance. Glenn suspected that they meant to charge his position at dark.

He strove again to catch sight of a target. Belly down, he peered stealthily around the boulder, rifle poked ahead and ready. And he did catch glimpse of a dim figure slipping from one rock to another. He took a quick snap shot that connected. The fellow yelled sharply, staggered, fell and lay still.

Glenn made the grim tally under his breath :"That's four! Leavin' five." He then considered the possibility of escape under cover of darkness. Success was remote. Retreat would only mean another stand somewhere up the canyon. There was no scaling those walls, anywhere. Might as well stay where he was and fight it out. . . .

Soft darkness was beginning to flow like a slow tide along the bottle-neck. And with it came the charge Glenn had expected. But he was alert. He poured thirty-thirties at the lancing gun flashes along either wall until the magazine was empty. He dropped the hot weapon, yanked out both six-guns, and turned them loose.

His fire was so rapid, so hot, that it broke the charge. The ruddy belches of those guns out front were suddenly lowered, telling him that his besiegers had dropped among the rocks. He reloaded swiftly with fingers that never fumbled. He wondered if he had connected with any of his attackers. He covertly studied the location of the slower gunfire, counted stabs of flame in five separate places, two on one side of the bottle-neck and three on the other. The odds were still five to one.

The bandits were working closer, ever closing in. Glenn held them back, retarded their progress, with an occasional well-placed bullet. Yet he realized, as his precious ammunition slowly dwindled, that sooner or later they'd be close enough to dare another charge.

It was very still now. Glenn was straining his ears for sounds out front, when he heard a sound behind him—the faint scrape of a shod hoof on stone. He wheeled alertly.

Sounds of hoofs quickening. And a moment later the pack horse, alone and seeking the company of its kind —which it had not found at the camp up-canyon—came ambling wearily in to rub noses with the pinto.

For a moment Glenn thoughtfully regarded the misshapen loom of the pack. Then a swift eagerness, a sudden hope, animated him. He moved quickly, silently, in the darkness. His flying fingers began to work at the diamond hitch that held the pack.

OUT there among the rocks Black Mac looked at the rapidly brightening sky and cursed irritably. Once the moon should come to illumine their position, the task of clearing a

way to the gold would be doubly difficult. He ordered a charge.

Hugging the base of the wall, three on one side and two on the other, they ran forward, darting gun flames leaping from outstretched hands. The night was rent by the roar and clamor of those five belching weapons.

But, strangely, there was no answering fire from Glenn's position. Black Mac noticed this and craftily slowed, wondering why.

The four were converging. Shooting wildly, yelling now a throaty triumph, they were within ten yards of their objective. Black Mac was as many yards behind them.

A faint flare, as of a struck match, lit the wall alongside the boulder for a moment. And a split second later a tiny eye of red, spitting sparks, cut a swift arc from behind the boulder and landed squarely in front of the charging men.

Black Mac checked himself, turned desperately to run. But before he had taken three steps the night echoed with mighty thunder. And, as if a sudden giant hand had smote him on the back, he sprawled headlong, his weapon flying. . . .

That blast of buckling air flowed around and over the big boulder, making Glenn's ears ring but not harming him. He rose and scaled the rampart like a mountain cat. He stood there on its crest, legs spread, a gun in each hand, alert to finish with lead, if needful, the work of that bomb he'd built by tying together four sticks of dynamite and a short length of fuse from the pack.

The moon sailed clear of the rimrock, pouring a flood of green-white light into the rocky cut. It revealed to Glenn a ragged depression out there in front of the boulder where the dynamite had let go—where the four men had been charging almost shoulder to shoulder. A basket would have been needed to collect them.

Glenn's eye traveled beyond. He saw a bulky figure getting dazedly to its feet. His gun swung that way—but he stayed his finger on the trigger, for that figure was Black Mac.

Glenn leaped down, skirted the hole, and confronted the killer of his father.

The two faced each other. Black Mac looked queerly bewildered, but he was recovering fast. And he read sure doom in the posture of the slightly crouched, steel-hard figure before him.

"I ain't heeled!" Black Mac kept repeating over and over.

Glenn made no audible comment. But his grim young face expressed bitter contempt. He tossed one of his two six-guns at Black Mac Slade's feet.

"Pick it up!" he ordered.

Black Mac stared at the six-gun glinting at his feet in the moonlight.

Glenn's iron chocked home in its holster.

"Pick it up, Slade!"—relentlessly.

Black Mac's tongue flicked along his lower lip. . . . His eyes gleamed, calculating chances. . . . With a sudden desperate move, he stooped and swept up the six-gun.

Glenn waited until the swift muzzle of Black Mac's weapon was almost upon him. Then his gun hand—and it might have been Rand, Rogers' own, the speed with which it moved—streaked holsterward.

The two guns roared almost as one—Glenn's a shade before Black Mac's.

The heavy slug struck Black Mac squarely on the breast bone. He staggered, braced his legs, and tried again to lift the smoking gun in his hand. But it was no use. His fingers relaxed. The weapon dropped. He wheeled slowly around and fell crashing.

Glenn holstered his own smoking weapon. As he stood looking down upon the lifeless huddle in the moonlight that had been the killer of his father, he unconsciously dusted the palms of his hands, one against the other, as if to rid them of a stain that was unclean.

# *FOUR MEN TO GET!*

**AN OUTSTANDING WESTERN NOVEL**

*By Johnston McCulley*

**Read in the opening paragraphs what has happened thus far—then go on with the story.**

PART THREE

DAN RILEY, Texas Ranger, is on the trail of four wanted men he had allowed to escape through carelessness. He comes to the town of Mesaville, learning that the four are in the vicinity. On the trail he attaches to himself in friendship a somewhat comical individual who calls himself Don Esteban Marcos Pulido.

At the Mesaville cantina, Riley meets the Mexican girl who caused him all his trouble. In that town, also, he is instrumental in saving the life of Betty Granton, daughter of the manager of the big Granton ranch, which is owned by a rich syndicate.

Sam Akers, one of the four sought by Riley, comes to Mesaville, and is slain by Dan in a gun duel. Riley accepts Akers' job on the Granton ranch, having ascertained that the other three outlaws are going to work there, and wondering at the reason for it. On the way to the ranch, Riley and Don Esteban are ambushed, but fight off their foes and escape. Arriving at the ranch, Riley is surprised at being told by Kline, the superintendent, that Granton has changed his mind and does not want them to work there.

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Trip Back*

DAN RILEY was so used to meeting the unexpected that it seldom shocked him. In his life, an emergency always had been just around the corner. But this was something of a blow.

"I don't understand," Riley said. "Mister Granton told me—"

"I know," Kline interrupted. "But there are swift changes often in the affairs of a big company."

"I reckon a small man like me in an

assistant foreman's job wouldn't mix up much in company business."

"There's no argument, Riley."

"I ain't tryin' to argue, Mister Kline. I'm just sayin' that it's funny. I ride out here with my friend, Esteban, to take jobs, and you say there ain't any for us. It's a long way to Mesaville, and we had a little brush with some hombres, and Esteban's horse is hurt so he can't travel fast."

Riley thought that he saw Kline's eyes glow at that statement, but could not be sure.

"Sorry about the horse," Kline said.

"Well, if there ain't jobs, there ain't. Funny thing is that I told Mister Granton I wasn't downright particular whether I took a job or not, and he seemed right tickled when I said I would."

"Changed his mind," said Kline.

"Could I maybe see Mister Granton?"

"Afraid not. He's quite busy at the house."

"Uh-huh! How about Esteban leavin' his horse here and usin' a ranch horse to get to town?"

"We don't let strangers have our horses. Blooded stock and all that."

"Yeah? Esteban's horse is a good one, and he's a good rider. You ain't got any objections, I reckon, if we go to the cook shack and get us a little snack."

"We're not running a hotel here, Riley," Kline told him. "You and your friend better get back to Mesaville."

Riley's eyes grew narrow, and his face flushed beneath its protecting coat of tan. No ranch he had ever known had refused to feed visitors. Hospitality was always extended. The loan of a horse would not have been refused elsewhere, so far as Riley knew.

But he remembered that this huge affair was operated by a wealthy syndicate, and that they ran on a strictly business basis. The operating agents were not Westerners with the Western spirit.

"All right!" Riley said. "The trail's free, anyhow. If anybody tries to stop us usin' that, they want to come at us with their guns ready. Many thanks for your kindness, Mister Kline!"

"Are you trying to be sarcastic?" Kline asked, belligerently.

"What do you think?" Riley countered.

He backed out through the door and put on his hat. Untying his horse, he got into the saddle, taking his sweet time about it. He had a glimpse of Kline's face at the window as he swung his horse around and started toward the lane.

A fine bunch of mystery around this outfit, Dan Riley told himself. Hiring outlaws for assistant foremen, and the girl hinting at trouble, and a superintendent acting in a manner almost inhuman!

But the only thing that worried him was the long trip back to Mesaville, and Esteban with an injured horse. Riley came to the lane and turned down it toward the distant gate. He saw Esteban coming with a couple of the Granton cowboys, and spurred to meet him.

"Want to see you, Esteban," Riley said, having saluted the others.

They rode on, and Esteban stopped.

"How's your horse?"

"He must have tripped, señor, and sprained his leg," Esteban said. "A little rest, and he will be as well as ever. In a pasture, or even a corral where there are not too many other horses—"

"Think he can stand the trip back to Mesaville?"

"Back to Mesaville?" Esteban gasped. "But I thought we had come out here to work. Have you a new insane idea now, Señor Dan? Is it not enough for one day that we ride and fight and get thrown, always with a vision of greasy pots and pans before the eyes?"

"Yeah? You can damned well get that vision out of your eyes," Riley

told him. "Even before we start work, we're fired."

"You mean they don't want us?"

"I sure got that impression," Riley said. "No explanations. There's a fancy kind of foreman named Kline, and he says that Mister Granton changed his mind about wantin' us to work. I asked him to change horses for you, and he wouldn't. On top of that, he didn't want to let us go to the cook shack and eat."

"Señor!" Don Esteban cried. "I never have heard of such a thing. In this country, the wanderer is always welcome to food. I wish you had not mentioned it, Señor Dan. Because of the excitement, I ate little yesterday and last night. This morning I had only a dozen or so tortillas at the hut of my friend. I am famished at this moment."

"Take a tuck in your belt, Esteban," Riley advised. "You won't get any eats this side of Mesaville, far as I know. It's the horse I'm worryin' about."

"He can make the journey, Señor Dan, but it will have to be a slow one."

"That'll be nice, with the sun blazin' down as it is. Can't be helped, I reckon."

"It is Fate!" Don Esteban pronounced.

"We might as well start. I've got a lot of thinkin' to do," Riley told him. "Can't understand this deal. The girl seemed to know that we were comin' to work here—said she might want to see me later and ask me somethin'."

"It will be a terrible ride, but Mesaville will be at the end of it," Esteban said. "The cantina of Pablo Lopez, and his charming dau—I beg pardon, Señor Dan! I almost mentioned a woman."

"I'll stick to my original plan," Riley said. "The men I'm after are comin' to this neighborhood, so I'll just wait for 'em to show up. We've just had a long ride for nothin'."

"And a fight, señor!"

"And a—" Riley stopped speaking, and a peculiar expression came into his face. "Uh-huh! We've got to go back the same way we came. Through that little pass. Now, I wonder—"

"You anticipate another fight, señor? *Dios!*"

"Let's start!" Riley said.

They went through the gate and started along the dusty road beneath the blistering sun, their hats pulled down to shield their eyes, and their neck-cloths pulled up so high that they almost met the hats.

They could not travel faster than a walk. Don Esteban's horse limped badly, and should not have been ridden at all. The fine dust swirled around them on the hot wind, and the relentless sun burned them.

Riley was trying to analyze the situation—and the man Kline. He was commencing to gather some vague ideas regarding the situation. But he told himself that his principal interest in life was to sear the remaining three names off his leather hatband, and that he should think of nothing else.

Bancord! Whalen! Lachmer!

Bully Bancord was all that his name implied, a devotee of all iniquities. He was about fifty, and at least forty of those years had been spent in criminal pursuits. As a boy, he had helped rustle cattle, and at seventeen had slain his first man.

Hank Whalen was tall and thin and noted for his cruelty. He was cold-blooded and steel-nerved, the type to blast a path through life with a six-gun.

And Dude Lachmer! There was a rogue! About twenty-eight, tall and handsome, given to fine raiment and fancy boots. But, at his age, he had as many crimes chalked up against him as the others. And he was the worst type—in the game for the excitement as well as the gain.

Riley glanced at Esteban, who had slouched to one side of the saddle and appeared about half asleep. At

the rate they were traveling, it would take them the remainder of the day to get to Mesaville—if they got there at all.

For Riley was a little apprehensive about this return journey. If Pete Drake and his friends were waiting in ambush again, they might be successful. Esteban's horse could not carry him at any rate of speed.

As they rode along, Riley got his six-gun out of the holster and examined it, made sure that it was loaded. Esteban saw him, and did the same. Their glances met. Presently, they came to a place where rocks flanked a curve and cast some shade, and where there was protection from wind, dust and sun.

There they stopped and dropped their neck-cloths, took swigs of warm water from their canteens, made cigarettes and lighted them, and relaxed for a moment. The horses needed a breathing spell, too.

Riley got down and examined Esteban's horse. It was a bad sprain, he decided, and it would be criminal to make the animal travel fast for even a short distance. His own mount could carry double, but not all the way to Mesaville, and certainly not if they were trying to race with enemies.

"Señor Dan, you seem troubled," Esteban said.

"Don't like the looks of things. You ain't got any business runnin' around with me, Esteban. There you were, a happy cuss wanderin' around and visitin', and singin' for your meals and drink, and never in any trouble. Then you hook up with me. It ain't you these hombres are after. Stay away from me, and you'll stay away from a mess of grief."

"Grief is pleasure when shared with a friend, señor."

Riley grinned. "All right, hombre! Stick! We'll battle our way through no matter what happens."

"Somebody," Esteban observed, suddenly, "is coming from the ranch in a hurry!"

Riley jerked his head around so that his ears caught the wind at the right angle. He heard the pounding of galloping hoofs. He jerked out his six-gun, and Esteban did the same, and they backed their mounts off the trail and beneath an overhanging rock.

The hoofbeats came nearer, and nearer. A puff of dust in the distance told where the rider was traveling. The rock-bordered curve hid everything else.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *A New Way Home*

AROUND the curve dashed the big black, with Betty Granton in the saddle. She was upon them, past them in a flash, then was fighting to bring the horse under control and stop him, for he had been running free.

She disappeared in a cloud of dust, but, just as Riley and Esteban were preparing to take after her, they saw her coming back. So they waited in the shade beneath the ledge.

"Oh, I'm so glad I overtook you!" she cried.

Her flushed face showed that she recently had indulged in a fit of anger, and that she was not quite over it yet.

"Any trouble?" Riley asked. "You sure were goin'. That black is a great horse."

"And where were you and your friend, Esteban, going?" she asked.

"Back to Mesaville, I reckon."

"Why? I thought you were going to work for dad."

"So did we," Riley told her. "I reported to that Mister Kline."

"And what was it he said that made you mad, so you wouldn't take the job?"

"What's that?" Riley cried.

"Kline told dad that you got mad about something, and wouldn't take the job. Said you seemed to think you'd ought to live at the ranch

house and eat with the family, and not do any work."

"Yeah? Some day, somewhere, I aim to meet up with Mister Kline," Riley declared.

"Just as I thought! He lied when he told dad all that stuff, didn't he?"

"He sure and certain did. I reported, like I said, and he said your dad had changed his mind, and that there wasn't any work for Esteban and me. I knew they were hirin' good men wherever they could find 'em, bein' short-handed, so I figured maybe me and Esteban ain't good men."

"What else happened?" Betty demanded.

"Nothin' else could. He said there wasn't any jobs for us, and that settled it, him bein' the foreman. Then I asked could Esteban trade horses, account of his bein' hurt, and he said they didn't let everybody have their horses."

"Oh, the beast! And that poor horse scarcely able to walk!"

"Ah, but, beautiful señorita, that is not the worst!" Esteban put in. "The long trip, the excitement—we were famished."

"You mean you were," Riley said.

"And Señor Dan suggested, so he says, that we be allowed to go to the cook shack and get a little snack of food, and this Señor Kline, he—"

"Refused?" she snapped.

"I reckon," Riley replied.

"Why, that—if it ever gets out, it'll disgrace the outfit forever!" she cried. "The beast! The brute!"

"Please, Miss Granton, what happened?" Riley wanted to know.

"I don't know myself. I found that you'd started back, and Kline told dad that you got mad and wouldn't take the jobs. So I rode after you, to give you a piece of my mind. I'd hinted to you about some things, Riley—"

"The name's Dan."

"All right, Dan. And I thought it was funny you'd go away like that, without saying a word to me. I—I was hoping that you'd really help me."

"I'll help you any time I can, sure. What's behind it?" Riley asked.

She glanced toward Esteban.

"Oh, Esteban's all right," said Riley.

"There's some sort of trouble now between dad and Kline, I think. Kline isn't just an ordinary foreman or superintendent—he represents some of the syndicate's stockholders. So dad is compelled to listen to him."

"Can't just fire him and kick him out?"

"No." She smiled a bit. "I want you to come back."

"That'd be ridin' right into trouble and fuss," Riley explained. "For some reason, Kline don't want me to work there. It's all right with me. I ain't crazy about takin' a job just now—got somethin' else to do."

"Nor I!" said Esteban. He drew himself up in his saddle. "Because his friend wished it, Don Esteban Marcos Pulido was prepared to wash pots and pans, and even peel potatoes. But his heart will not break if that is denied him, and he be allowed to return to Mesaville and loiter around the cantina."

"I wish you'd come back—Dan."

"Then I'd be the center of trouble, and everybody'd be watchin' me, and I couldn't help you, maybe. Understand?" Riley asked. "Some things you hinted at hook up with some things I know. Maybe I can get better results by hangin' around Mesaville."

"Then I'll keep in touch with you," she said. "If I need you, I'll send one of the boys I can trust, with a note. He'll find you, if you're in town."

"That'll be fine!" Riley said. "I'll be around somewhere. I've got to keep my eyes on a few hombres."

"The ones we talked about?"

"Yeah!"

"And I'll try to let you know if they come to the ranch without passing through Mesaville first," she said.

Then she touched the black with

her tiny spurs, and was away in a cloud of dust, dashing back toward the ranch.

"There goes the sort of señorita," said Esteban, "that love songs are written about."

"Oh, she's all right—for a woman," Riley observed. "You'd better get your mind off that love-song mush and put it on somethin' we're liable to run into. It's a long way to Mesaville."

They rode out under the hot sun and followed the winding trail. Mile after mile, with their mounts walking, they endured the heat and the dust. At times, Riley had Esteban get up beside him, and they led the later's mount.

Then they came to another bunch of rocks, where there was a little shade, and stopped to rest and recuperate. Tobacco and papers came out, after faces had been mopped and swigs taken from the canteens.

"I've been wonderin'," Riley said, as he rolled his cigarette, "whether we might run into some hostile hombres when we come to that little pass."

"Ah, señor! I, too, have been wondering," Esteban replied. "As I told you when first we met, I have a knowledge of this country. Let us not inquire how I got it. I was a young man once, and liked to roam the hills."

"You damned well mean you had to hide out from a posse," Riley told him, "but no matter."

"And it has just occurred to me, señor, that I know a way to Mesaville which does not run through the pass. If enemies are waiting there, we can turn from this trail before they see us."

"That sounds mighty fine, Esteban."

So, when they started out again, Esteban led the way, and they departed from the main trail and went down into a coulee, and from that to a dry watercourse, which they followed on its curving way to the hills.

Since they traveled so slowly, because of Esteban's horse, and the wind was churning the dust from the brush anyhow, there were no lifting puffs of dust to show their progress.

After a long time down there where the sun was hotter and there was not even the warm breeze, they got out of the watercourse and cut across a field of boulders. The pass was behind them, and between them and it was a rock formation which cut off the view.

Then Esteban led the way into the hills, following a narrow path. Here there was some shade, and grass that was not burned, and finally Esteban called a halt, dropped his neckcloth, waited until Riley had done the same—and smiled.

"Señor Dan," he asked, "how would you like a drink of icy cold water, and to fill your canteen with the same?"

"The heat's gone to your head," Riley said.

"Let us see!"

They dismounted and trailed the reins, and let the horses nibble at the half-green grass. Esteban led the way back through the rocks to a cold spring, where they drank and filled the canteens. The horses could not reach the spring, but they carried water to them in their hats, and also some with which to bathe the leg Esteban's horse had sprained.

"Now we can proceed with some comfort," Esteban said.

"We're goin' a long way around, seems to me."

"There is not the difference of a mile," Esteban assured him. "Around the shoulder of the next hill, we can see Mesaville."

They came to the town an hour and a half later, approaching from the south instead of the north, and put up their horses in Lopez' stable. Esteban attended to the sprain as well as he could.

Then they engaged the same patio rooms they had the night before, and went outside to sit against the wall of the building and smoke and talk, and rest.

It was just before sunset when two horsemen came riding at a leisurely rate of speed down the north trail and toward the cantina. Riley shifted his holster, so the gun would be handy. Esteban took precautions also.

The riders neared the hitch-rail, and one of them observed the pair and whispered to the other. The second looked at them, and muttered curses.

"Howdy, Drake!" Dan Riley called. "You look all worn out. Must have been out in the sun all day. Watchin' the pass, maybe, huh?"

## CHAPTER XIV

### *In the Patio*

NIGHT came, and the cantina once more became a scene of activity. Men came in off the south trail. Frequently, a heavy vehicle lumbered by. Horses squealed and kicked at the hitch-rails.

Dan Riley walked around and listened to the gossip, though pretending not to do so, and Esteban always was near, prepared to give aid if trouble broke out.

Finally, Riley sat in a corner near the piano, while the cantina girls were dancing and singing, and Esteban, feeling that his friend was safe with his back against a wall, drifted to the bar to talk to a man he knew.

Carmelita Lopez slipped quietly along the wall and stood beside Riley. He got a whiff of perfume, and glanced up at her, to meet a dimpling smile and flashing eyes.

"All dressed up for a killin', huh?" Riley said. "Whose wine are you—"

"Stop, señor! You said that you forgave. Do not, then, be continually speaking of things."

"You're right, Carmelita. Well, how's everything?"

"Very nice, indeed, Señor Dan. So you did not go to work at the Granton ranch. That is well. You should be above the ordinary punching of cows, Señor Dan. Such a task is beneath you."

"Rats! I punched cows before I joined the Rangers."

"But, since you joined them—ah, no, señor! Too fine a man to be a common cowpuncher. And that Esteban! What a cook he would have made. He rejoices that you did not go to work at the ranch."

"I ain't doubtin' that last statement a bit," Riley told her, laughing.

"Now you are safe, Señor Dan."

"What you mean by that?" he asked.

"You, who hate women so, and would have nothing whatever to do with them—you are safe. Had you worked at the ranch, the yellow-haired girl would have had you. That was her thought, Señor Dan. When you stopped her runaway horse, and rebuked her for not handling him, you won her heart. From that very window, I saw the look in her eyes."

"Yeah? Then the way to win a woman is to rave at her, huh? Just goes to show what sense a woman's got."

She bent forward, as though to slap him on the arm playfully, but in reality so she could whisper: "Order wine, that I may serve it and drink with you. We must talk."

Riley glanced at her swiftly, and caught an expression of seriousness in her face.

"Sure!" he said.

She hurried away, her high heels *tap-tapping* the cantina floor, her head tossed proudly, her skirts swishing from side to side with the swing of her hips. Carmelita was a beauty—and she knew it.

Soon she was back with the wine and glasses on a tray. She sat down beside Riley and served it. Lopez had a rule in his cantina that no girl could sit at a table with a man unless wine was bought, and even Carmelita

observed the rule. The wine also meant that Riley had exclusive right to this girl's company as long as the wine lasted, and nobody would bother them.

"What's troublin' you, if anything?" Riley asked.

"Pretend to be interested, to flirt—smile and laugh," she whispered. "Nobody must dream that I ever give you information. I overhear a lot, Señor Dan. But, if they ever suspect me of telling, they will begin to speak carefully in my presence. Then I never shall learn anything."

"I get it!" Riley said. He laughed a little, as though at something amusing she had told him.

"Bully Bancord and Hank Whalen passed through the village of Quebrada this morning," she said. "They were riding good horses. They had packs with them, light ones. They stopped at Quebrada only for a time at the cantina, and then took to the trail again."

"Light packs won't slow 'em up. It means they'll sleep out tonight, maybe in a dry camp, and come right on. And they'll be here tomorrow."

"*Sí*, señor! They gave out that they were coming here to meet Sam Akers, and that—the expression is Americaño, but I believe I remember it—that they had something soft."

"You've got it, all right," Riley said, and this time he did not have to pretend to be laughing. "So Bancord and Whalen are travelin' together! A couple of hard hombres! Ever hear anything about Dude Lachmer? You used to like the Dude, didn't you, Carmelita? He's a handsome dog."

Her face flamed. "*Sí!* He is a dog, Señor Dan! Like him? I detest him. I—"

"That's enough! I just wanted to be sure that you'd tell me the truth where the Dude's concerned, and I reckon you will. Ever hear anything about Lachmer, huh?"

"Only a rumor, señor, that he is to join the others soon. He is at present down in Mexico. They say he is a colonel in the army."

"His own army, maybe," Riley said, laughing again. "Thanks, Carmelita! You're sure a help."

"I am but trying to atone, señor, for the wrong I did you."

"You ain't a bad girl at all," he said.

"You like me a little, Señor Dan?"

"Don't commence that, now!" Riley warned.

"There is something else, too," she said. "It might be wise for you to beware Señor Pete Drake."

"Don't worry. I've got my eyes on him."

"It seems that he and some of his friends have been away all day. One returned with a bullet in his shoulder, and another had been scratched on the wrist. And Señor Drake is very angry about something that did not happen."

"I'm bettin'!" Riley said. "If it'd happened, I wouldn't be here listenin' to you, maybe."

She left him, then, and went back to the piano to sing, and Esteban, who had been waiting and watching in the near distance, hurried up and took the chair Carmelita had vacated.

"Señor Pedro Drake is prowling around like a she-bear who has lost her only cub," Esteban said. "It is in my mind that only one of us sleep at a time, and the other watch."

"Might be a good idea, at that," Riley answered. "You do your sleepin' first."

"But no, señor! That would not be right."

"You do as I say. You're fat, and need a lot of sleep. Me, I can damned well get along without it. I've slept with one eye open for so long that I never know whether I'm asleep or not."

"As you say, Señor Dan." Esteban yawned.

Half an hour later, they had their nightcap, nodded to Lopez and grinned at Carmelita, and waded

through the crowd along the bar to get to the front door. That was Riley's idea, instead of going directly to the patio. He wished to see whether anybody had an undue interest in their movements.

They went out into the moonlight and walked down toward the stable, as though to get their horses. In the darkness against the stable wall, they watched.

A man slipped furtively from the shadows and hurried to the cantina, and through a window they could see him say something to Pete Drake. The latter appeared to grow excited. He emerged from the cantina and made his way toward the stable, keeping in the darkness as much as possible. At the side of a clump of brush, he crouched to watch.

"He's sure got a lot of interest in our comin's and goin's," Riley said. "Thinks that maybe we're gettin' our horses to go somewhere. All set to trail us with some of his friends, I reckon."

"*Sí.* It will be wise for us to sleep one at time," Esteban declared.

Drake was growing nervous watching beside the clump of brush. Riley and Esteban went quietly on around the stable, around an adobe hut adjoining it, came to the streak of blackness cast by the cantina building itself, and got inside again. They lounged at the head of the bar and watched the open door.

A moment later, Drake appeared. One of his men undoubtedly had gone out in search of him.

"Howdy, Drake!" Riley greeted. "Been out takin' a walk in the moonlight?"

Drake lurched toward them, his eyes blazing angrily, and Riley quickly balanced his body and bent slightly forward, standing on the balls of his feet, ready for any emergency.

"I'm gettin' pretty sick o' you, Riley!" Drake said.

"Any time you want a pill, Drake, I'll furnish it—a lead one! Does your whole gang run to ambushin'? Better pull in your claws, Drake, and wait for reinforcements. I understand you've got some friends comin' along in a few days."

"If you're wise, Riley, you'll leave Mesaville before they get here."

"I never did have any sense—so I reckon I'll stay."

Drake muttered something and turned away from them, to cross the room. Riley and Esteban went toward the rear of the cantina, where a door opened into the patio.

"Sweet dreams, Esteban," Riley said. "Curl up your fat little tummy, and don't forget to snore."

"I go to my repose this night thankful in particular for one thing," Esteban said. "And it is in my mind to say a prayer for that Señor Kline, who refused me the job of cook's assistant."

Esteban opened the door of the little cell-like room and went inside. Riley remained in the shadows. When he was sure that nobody had seen or heard him, he went to the end of the patio wall, sat upon the ground, and there made himself as comfortable as possible.

If anything happened, it would be at a very late hour, perhaps just before the dawn, when slumbering men sleep soundest, when their brains have toyed with the events of the day before, and run through the gamut of dreams, and finally seek a moment of peace before starting to function again.

For Dan Riley had no intention of arousing Esteban in the middle of the night and letting him stand the second watch. Not that he did not trust Esteban, and not that he doubted his alertness and quick judgment. But Dan Riley liked to attend to his own affairs himself.

Riley had spent a hard day, and the day before had not been of the easiest. But he was at his best when living at high pressure. Rangers lived at high pressure continually—else

soon they would cease to live at all.

He slipped into his room and fixed the blankets on the cot so they would resemble a sleeping man, as he had done the night before. But he did not remain in the room. He estimated that, a certain time later, the moonlight, streaming into the room through the little, steel-barred window, would touch that roll of blankets and indicate a human form.

Riley crossed the patio again, keeping in the dark spots, and once more sat down with his back to the wall. He did not smoke, lest the odor or glow of cigarette end betray his presence. Before long, he smiled at the heavy snores that came from the room occupied by Esteban.

There was a din in the cantina, and once he heard a shot, and at another time a girl's angry cry. Horsemen came and went along the dusty trail—those who traveled only at night, and generally knew when it was safe to travel at all.

Riley dozed, awoke, and dozed again. And again he awoke, to find that the moon had wheeled the sky, and that it was about three o'clock in the morning. His hand strayed to his holster, and he drew out his six-gun.

He had seen nothing, but some slight sound had brought him from half slumber. He did not shift his position, but watched and listened. And he heard the sound of a boot crunching gravel.

There was a darker shadow against the patio wall, on the opposite side. It moved along the wall slowly, a foot at a time. Without making the slightest noise, Dan Riley got to his feet.

The shadow crept along beneath the arches, from door to door. Finally, it stopped beside the door of Riley's room. Then it slipped along to the window, which was only a hole in the adobe, protected by a network of bars.

In the faint streak of moonlight, Riley could see a man's hand go up, could tell that the hand held a gun. The night was split with flame and shattered with a roar. Three shots barked. Then the man at the window turned and started to run to the end of the patio.

"Here I am, Drake!"

The fleeing man stopped, astounded. In front of him was Dan Riley, standing openly in the moonlight. Drake snarled, and threw up his gun again.

But Dan Riley did not wait for that shot. He placed his own where it pleased him. Drake dropped his gun and reeled back against the patio wall, as the cantina door was hurled open and the big room vomited men into the patio.

"Tried to kill me while I was asleep, huh?" Riley said. "I put that bullet in your shoulder on purpose, Drake. It's just a warnin'. Next time, I'll put it through your heart!"

A score of men had heard the accusation and noticed that it was not denied. Pete Drake, clutching his wounded shoulder, went through the gate and out into the night.

"Señor Riley, you are fortunate," Lopez said to him. "How did you come to suspect the man?"

Riley grinned in the darkness. "Anybody 'd suspect him, after takin' a good look," he replied.

"There is always trouble wherever you go, señor."

"He probably ruined one of your best blankets, Lopez. You better charge it up to him. If he won't pay, charge it to me. It's been worth it. Seems to be a nest of ambushers down this Mesaville trail. I yearn to find me a man who'll fight fair and square out in the open."

They all trooped back into the cantina room, and, now that the danger was over, Riley made a cigarette. He puffed in content as he walked back and forth before going to bed. He stopped once in front of the little window of the room in which Esteban was sleeping.

Esteban snored. Through it all, he

had snored. And, in the morning, he probably would not believe what they told him.

## CHAPTER XV

### *Surprise Party*

RILEY slept late, which is to say until sunrise. Esteban already was up, and in the cantina, talking to Lopez, who seldom slept at all, fearful that he might miss a few coins.

"Señor Dan!" Esteban cried. "What is this they tell me? Why did you not call to me?"

"You was snorin' somethin' beautiful," Riley said, as he gulped coffee and ate an omelet of peppers and grated chicken.

"It is rumored that Señor Drake had his shoulder mended, got his horse, and set out over the north trail."

"Goin' to meet his friends," Riley said. "A couple of 'em are due from Quebrada today. He'll tell 'em that I'm here, and they'll come into town ready to be violent, I reckon."

"More trouble!" said Esteban, and sighed.

"Yeah? I warned you not to tie up with me, Esteban. You'll maybe turn your back on me now. Tell folks you're mad at me and don't like me any more. You may live longer by doin' it."

"It is an insult, that thought!" Esteban cried. "Don Esteban Marcos Pulido never deserts a friend. You are the first real one I ever had, Señor Dan, and I cling to you like a cactus spine to a bare foot."

"It's your funeral—maybe," said Riley.

Carmelita came toward them from the kitchen with fresh coffee, and Riley kicked Esteban under the table.

"Get away from here," he said. "And you needn't grin like that, either. I ain't makin' love to the girl. She might have somethin' private to tell me about somethin'."

Esteban arose and bowed. "It is not the girl, señor, but the state of mind," he said. "There are other girls—some with golden hair and blue eyes. I shall sing a love song for you yet!"

"You get the hell out o' here!" Riley growled. "I don't like yellow hair any better than I do black."

Esteban departed, and Carmelita approached. Her eyes glistened as she looked at Dan Riley, and she talked as she poured the fresh coffee for him. Nobody was near.

"That was splendid last night, señor," she said. "That Senor Drake—I detest him!"

"You seem to be detestin' almost everybody," he said.

"Not everybody, señor."

"Don't start that, now. What's on your mind this mornin', if anything?"

"I have overheard just a few things that I do not quite understand, Señor Dan. But I can tell them to you, and perhaps they are worth something, and perhaps nothing."

"What is it?"

"Plans have been made for an enormous number of horses and cattle to be run over the Line."

"They're doin' that every day, Carmelita. Wet cattle. Stolen on one side and sold on the other."

"These are to go from the States to the other side. Thousands and thousands of them, señor, with scores of men in the drive. It is all arranged. It is to happen at a certain time. It is a great plot of some sort, señor."

"Somebody's crazy," Riley declared. "Where the blazes could rustlers get those thousands and thousands, huh? And runnin' them in that direction. Nobody over there to buy that many. Ain't got money enough, even at rustler prices."

"Could they not get the stock from the great Granton ranch, Señor Dan?"

"Sure! That ranch is lousy with stock, horses and cattle both. Owned by a syndicate—five big ranches in one. But it'd be a job, don't you see, Carmelita? Have to be a lot of men

in on it. They'd have to make the drive all at once to get away with it, in two nights anyhow. Couldn't be done, unless somebody on the inside—"

Dan Riley ceased speaking, sat up abruptly in his chair as though an electric shock had gone through his body. Somebody on the inside!

"What is the trouble, Señor Dan?" the girl asked.

"Just happened to think of somethin'," he said. "You listen to me, Carmelita. This here might be important—big enough to get the government interested, even. Learn all you can about it for me, huh?"

"Gladly, señor!" She flushed with pleasure.

"Know any of the men mixed up in it?"

"One of them was talking to Señor Drake."

"I reckon! You prob'ly can expect a lot of strangers around here some night, spendin' their money in the cantina. Then they'll disappear, and you won't ever see 'em again. And a lot of Granton horses and cattle will be disappearin' at about the same time. Now you'd better get away from me. We don't want to be seen talkin' together too much."

"I understand, Señor Dan. Men might think that I was giving you information."

"It ain't that. They might think we was sweetheartin', and that'd be a hell of a lot worse."

Esteban returned, but Riley told him nothing. He wanted to think this thing out. Something big, undoubtedly. And—somebody on the inside! Friction between Granton and Kline, his superintendent, who represented some of the syndicate's shareholders!

Throughout the day, Riley and Esteban rested, besides watching the north trail and the hills to the west. If Drake had gone out to meet Bully Bancord and Hank Whalen, and warn them of Riley's presence, the pair might try to slip into town unobserved and try to catch Riley off guard.

It was the middle of the afternoon when they saw a puff of dust coming along the trail, a moving black spot ahead of it.

"Somebody in a hurry," Riley said.

"It must be something serious, señor, for him to travel so in the heat of the day. Properly, this is the siesta hour, when a *hidalgo* does nothing but rest."

"Yeah? You have it your way, you'd be a *hidalgo* and the siesta twenty-four hours long."

"Don Esteban Marcos Pulido does not believe in useless exertion."

"I can go you one better than that—you don't believe in exertion of any kind," Riley told him, laughing.

They watched the approaching horseman. He was coming at a speed greater than ordinary. The lifting dust cloud trailed behind him like smoke behind a steamship. He swept down the slope and around a curve, disappeared into a depression and emerged, and dashed on toward the town.

"One hombre in a hurry!" Riley commented. "Know him, Esteban?"

"I do not recognize him yet, Señor Dan. But the horse looks like the sort they raise on the Granton ranch."

"Maybe somebody's sick."

"There is no doctor in Mesaville, señor. He died himself, of old age, three years ago."

"Yeah? Maybe it's just some thirsty cowpoke in a hurry to get a drink. Know soon, I reckon."

The horseman cut across the plaza, the hoofs of his mount sending the gravel flying. He skidded his horse to a stop and vaulted out of the saddle, trailing the reins and not stopping to tether the horse. Then he hurried into the cantina.

"I said it—in a hurry to get a drink," Riley remarked.

"That is a Granton ranch horse, señor."

"They've got plenty of 'em out there."

"And would not lend one to me. A pest on them!" Esteban pronounced. "I am glad that we did not go to work there, Señor Dan."

"I believe you, Don Esteban!"

Through an open window of the cantina, Lopez thrust his head.

"You out there, Riley?" he howled.

"Right here, Lopez! What's the trouble?"

"Nothing. Just stay there, señor."

Riley and Esteban got to their feet, wondering what that might mean. Out of the cantina door rushed the rider who had just reached the town, to hurry up to them.

"Dan Riley? Got a letter for you," he said, handing it over. "Told me to fan and fog and get in your hands as soon as possible."

"Wait a minute," Riley said. "You've delivered it, so there ain't any more rush. Light up a cigarette, while I have a look."

As he spoke, he tore open the envelope, and also scrutinized the man who had given it to him. He was a young cowpuncher, scarcely more than a boy.

"Work for Granton?" Riley asked.

"Yeah! That letter's from the ranch."

"So I see," Riley observed. "I'll be lookin' into it."

The great Granton ranch had such things as printed letterheads and envelopes. A glance at the envelope had confirmed that for Riley. Now he drew out a folded sheet of paper, and opened it to find a note written on a printed letterhead.

He read the note swiftly, read it a second time, while Esteban yawned and pretended not to be interested, and the messenger did considerable nervous fidgeting.

There were two notes, strictly speaking. The first was signed by Bill Kline, the superintendent:

> Mr. Riley:
> I made an unfortunate error yesterday, which I hope you will be broadminded enough to overlook. I was laboring under a misunderstanding.
> Please come to the ranch at once and assume the position of assistant foreman Mr. Granton offered you. You may also bring your comical friend along.

The second note was very short, written in a woman's hand. It said: "Please come at once, Dan." And it was signed "Betty."

Riley folded the notes and toyed with them while he looked at the messenger.

"Who gave this letter to you?" he asked.

"Mister Kline."

"And he told you to find me and deliver it right away?"

"That's right."

"How's things at the ranch?"

"Why, just as usual, I reckon."

"Any men hired today—new ones?"

"Not as I know of."

"All right! I'll 'tend to this," Riley said. "Thanks, kid, for gettin' here with it so quick."

"You're the man who shot Sam Akers, ain't you?"

"I am, but I don't like to have such things talked about much."

"I just wanted to say," the boy declared, "that you did a mighty good job."

"A lot of folks agree to that. You'd better rest up yourself and your horse before you go back."

The puncher hurried back into the cantina, and Don Esteban Marcos Pulido, choking with curiosity, approached his friend.

"A fine lad to be a messenger of love!" said Esteban. "He rides like the wind—"

"Esteban, brace yourself against the cantina wall," Riley interrupted. "You're about to be shocked. We're goin' to do some ridin' our own selves, right away. That's the first shock. In this sun and heat, and we're goin' to ride fast. You'll have to borrow a mount from Lopez, so get busy."

"At times, friendship is a burden," Esteban observed.

"And here's the second shock, Esteban—we're goin' to work at the Gran-

ton ranch after all. They just can't get along without us. They've sent for us."

"Pots and pans—and potatoes!" sighed Esteban. "Do you think it wise, Señor Dan?"

"I sure do. Them hombres ought to be there today or tomorrow. I can handle 'em as well there as here, and maybe better. You see about that horse."

Esteban went into the cantina, shaking his head as though to say that Fate dealt him many a hard blow. Riley walked along the hitch-rail and inspected the horse of the messenger. He watched the nostrils, the heaving sides, felt of the wet skin, inspected the mouth foam, and the lather at the edge of the saddle blanket. Then he grinned.

"Rode like hell to get here," he muttered. "He rode like hell from the top of that hill three miles away, knowin' he could be seen—but he was doin' ordinary ridin' before that."

Then he hurried to the stable to get his own horse ready, and Esteban appeared with Lopez to get ready another horse. They led the mounts out and across to the cantina hitch-rail.

"Lopez, I want to borrow a couple of rifles and some ammunition," Riley said. "One for me and one for Esteban. I know you've got plenty of guns."

"Rifles, señor?" Lopez gasped. "You are going hunting, perhaps?"

"Yeah! And maybe after big game."

THROUGH the sun they rode, taking the messenger along with them. He had a fresh horse, for the Granton ranch always kept a couple in Lopez' stable for the use of their men.

When they came to the broken country, Riley got his rifle handy, and Esteban, as usual, emulated him. The cowpuncher seemed surprised.

"Lookin' for trouble?" he asked.

"We had some yesterday," Riley told him. "We're ready for it today."

"What's all the fuss about, anyhow?" the boy asked. "I know about you, of course, and how you've been lookin' for some men, and how you got Sam Akers, and about your hat—"

"Better stop, or you'll choke," Riley advised. "There's nothin' to it, boy, except this—some gents are out to get me, and I'm out to get them, and both of us want to be the first to do the gettin'. It's simple."

"Yeah, I see it is."

"'Bout as simple as you are. I had a look at your horse. He'd been lathered for three or four miles, and no more. You didn't ride like hell all the way from the ranch."

The boy looked alarmed. "Don't you tell the boss," he begged. "It was so hot, and I didn't see any sense in hurryin' so much. But, when I got in sight of the town—"

"Uh-huh! It'll be hotter, for you, if there's any crooked work along this trail, such as ambushin'."

But there was no ambush, much to Riley's surprise and Esteban's delight. They got safely through the pass and into the open, and headed for the ranch, the buildings of which they could see in the distance.

Dan Riley began to feel ashamed that he had suspected anything wrong. Perhaps Betty Granton merely had got her father and Kline together on the subject of hiring him. She wanted him there, feeling that she could trust him.

And Riley wanted to be there, because the three men he sought would be there soon, and because he wanted to solve the mystery that seemed to hang around the big ranch.

They came to the end of the lane. Riley scrutinized everything within sight. Everything seemed to be normal. A few men were working down by the barns and horse corral, and a couple were sitting on a bench in front of the bunkhouse.

"Reckon we'd better ride down to Kline's office, to find what all this is about," Riley said.

He led the way, Esteban close behind him, the horses at a walk. The young puncher turned and made for the horse corral, to put up his mount. Riley dismounted in front of the little office building and tied his horse, and Esteban remained in the saddle.

"Señor Dan, I shall not get on the ground until I am sure we are to remain," Esteban said. "The people around this ranch have the habit of changing their minds. No doubt, we shall be sent away again."

Riley laughed and knocked on the door.

"Come in!" He recognized the gruff voice of Bill Kline.

Riley opened the door and stepped inside, hat in hand. He regretted that fact an instant later. Even dropping a hat takes a fraction of a second, and that length of time often is important in drawing a gun.

On either side of the door, a man was standing. From either side, Dan Riley felt the muzzle of a gun jab him suddenly in the ribs.

"Get 'em up!" one of the men growled.

The other knocked Riley's hand aside and got the six-gun out of his holster.

"What's all this?" Riley demanded. "You sent for me, didn't you, Kline?"

"I did, yes. I wrote that letter."

"Then why have a couple of hombres stick me up?"

"Just wanted to get your gun away, Riley. You boys can clear out now."

The gun muzzles were removed; the two men went out and closed the door. Riley saw that Bill Kline had a gun on his desk before him.

"You needn't be afraid of me, Kline," Riley said. "I ain't killin' mad over what happened out here yesterday."

"Nobody's afraid of you, Riley. . . . Come out, boys!"

From behind the big filing cases in a corner, two men stepped forth—Bully Bancord and Hank Whalen.

*(Face to face with two hard hombres whom he has sworn to capture or kill, and stripped of his own gun, Dan Riley finds himself in a tight place. What will happen? Don't miss the next instalment of this thrilling serial!)*


## *In the next issue*

**will appear a powerful range novel by a new author—*Frederic Phelps*—who tells of some new Western thrills! It's called**

**SMILING DEATH**

# The Sluice Box

A Department
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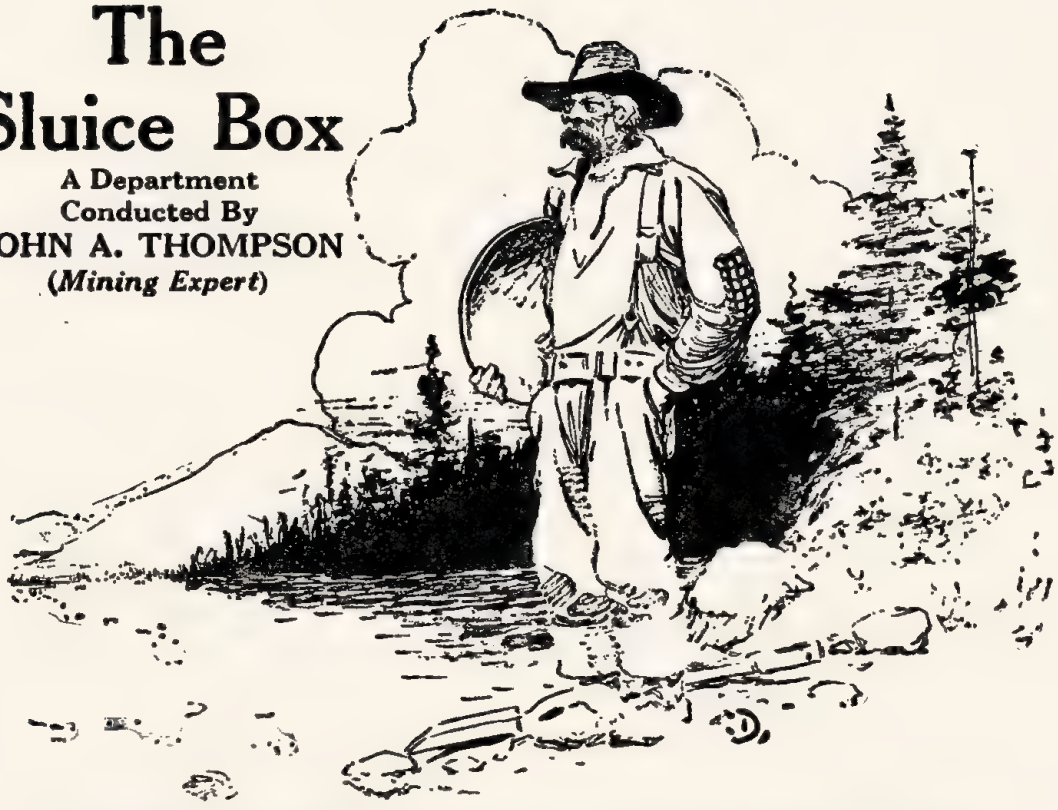

THIS department is intended to be of real interest and practical assistance to all readers of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. It is conducted by the well-known John A. Thompson, mining expert. In each issue will be published some interesting facts concerning the various phases of prospecting and mining, based on John A. Thompson's many years of actual experience in the West and in Alaska. Prospecting problems and procedure will be discussed regularly. Also, questions relating to mining laws, field conditions, new and old mining territories, and so forth, will be answered in this department. If you wish a personal answer, enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your question. Address all questions to John A. Thompson, Mining Expert, care of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE, 155 East 44th St., New York, N. Y.

## No. 107. Tools of the Hardrock Miner

IN the last issue of *ACE-HIGH* we laid out a lot of strenuous work for the fellow with, or in hopes of having, a gold lode prospect. We spoke of sinking shafts, of running tunnels, and of driving adits, explaining briefly the chief advantages and disadvantages of each separate method of approach in opening up a hardrock mine.

That's the point—hard rock. All this work has to be done in the most solid kind of terra firma. Obviously, the old garden spade is no good. Cutting a tunnel through bedrock takes drills and hammers—and powder. That last is a mighty touchy subject. When we come to it in this discussion, we will surround mention of its use with cautions and warnings. And right here and now, at the outset, we want to state that those warnings should not be unheeded.

I am no more afraid of a stick of dynamite than you are. But powder is nothing to fool around with carelessly. As a matter of fact, like a lot of other preachers, I have erstwhile been personally negligent in practice. But that doesn't make the advice any less sound. More years ago than it is happy to recall, I was mining at a summer camp in Alaska. Bunkhouse and cook shack were built tandem style, facing each other along the bank of a good-sized stream. The stream

abounded in sassy, fat grayling . . . good eating. And being too far away from any source of supply to have fresh meat as part of our diet, an occasional mess of fish sounded mighty appetizing.

We were proving up a tract of placer ground in the hope that it would turn out to be a good dredging proposition. The season was short. Time was shorter still on some of our options. We were putting in long hours, thanks to the plentiful daylight. And we had no time to fish.

One of the boys knew a couple of fellows about twelve miles away, across the divide. They had a little cabin there, he said, and up on a store-all under the eaves, he was sure that they had a fish net. We could set it, this sensible chap suggested, across a slough or draw in the stream and catch our fish while we worked. But no . . . that wouldn't do. Nobody had time to walk twenty-four miles to get a fish net.

We had a better idea: dynamite. So we cut sticks of powder in half, set a short fuse in one end, and tossed the things in an arc over the water—like kids fooling with firecrackers. The explosion stunned the fish temporarily, and they floated, belly up, to the surface. Then before they could snap out of it, we plunged into icy cold water in our hip boots and grabbed them and flipped them out onto the river bank. It was a quick way to get fish for supper.

We laughed somewhat at the idea of anyone being dope enough to walk twelve miles over a divide for a fish net. Then it happened. Somebody heaved a half stick with the sputtering fuse too short. The premature blast powder-burned one fellow badly. The surprise and the force of the detonation toppled another lad backwards. His head struck a jagged rock, cutting a nasty gash in his skull and laying him out cold for an hour. I was sent sprawling into the water, and it was days before the ringing in my ears stopped altogether and my hearing was back to normal.

But the next morning one of the boys took charge of the cooking and the camp chef walked over the divide for the fish net. . . .

The first equipment the prospector who fools around hard rock must have is something that can't be bought in the supply stores—stamina and a certain amount of steel-tough muscle. Shoveling rock and dirt, mucking, is back-breaking. Swinging a heavy, short-handled hammer on a rock drill, hand-making powder holes, requires muscular strength.

Still, that doesn't mean that the miner should be built like a heavyweight wrestler. On the contrary, smaller men do better, feel the fatigue of bad air and cramped positions less, can work in low tunnels, scramble around the narrow places better, and in general are more adapted to underground work. A good six-foot-plus husky is mighty handy out in the open on the windlass handle winding up buckets of rock. But a smaller man can get around better down below. As a general rule, most hardrock miners are fairly small men, but stout-hearted and stocky.

When it comes to drilling, we will consider, for the present at least, hand-drilling only. That's the way prospect shafts and prospect tunnels are started. Air-drilling and such comes later when the mine has been developed and it has been demonstrated that it warrants the expenditure which the use of machinery involves.

Drill steel is either round or octagonal. For single-hand work a three-quarter-inch drill should be used, and a short-handled hammer, weighing from three to four pounds, is generally considered most efficient. In double-hand work, where one man holds the drill and another swings a sledge, drill rods may be an inch or even an inch and a half in diameter. An eight-pound sledge will do to furnish the blows.

A three-foot hole is about the limit for hand work. The single-hand limit is apt to be less. A starter drill is about sixteen to eighteen inches long. A "set of steel" consists of drills of increasing length to be used as the hole deepens. As a rule, there is a foot increase between drills in a set.

The hole is actually drilled by the repeated sharp blows on the drill by the hammer. The drill bit, or cutting edge, bites into the rock and chips it a little as a result of the concussion. After each blow the drill is turned slightly. Holes may be drilled without water. The usual practice, however, is to keep the hole wet. A little water poured into it from a can will do the trick. And the water tends to preserve the temper of the drill. It also lays the fine dust and makes removal of the drill cuttings easier.

In hard, brittle rock that shatters comparatively easily, holes should be relatively deep and narrow. Tough rock calls for shorter, broader holes.

Drilling—hand-drilling—is slow, tedious work. Thirty inches a day is making good progress for the single-hand driller.

During the progress of a hole, the accumulated rock powder has to be removed continually as the hole sinks in. A "spoon," or long iron bar having a handle bent on one end and a spoon hammered into shape at the lower end, is a good tool for scraping out the muck from a wet hole. For getting sand out of a dry hole, and wet holes too in some instances, a "gun" may be used. The gun is just a long gas-pipe syringe fitted with a suction piston having a handle on its rod.

Now we come to another item: hardening steel. The hardrock camp should have a blacksmith shop, set out near the workings, with forge and anvil. Tempering steel comes best through actual experience, or from acting as a helper to an expert at it. It is one of those things that nearly everybody can learn to do passably well, but few ever develop into real wizards at it. It is a gift. Some blacksmiths seem to have a natural bent towards it, and such men are priceless adjuncts around a big mine.

However, the best we can do here is to explain the principles of the operation. A steel is said to be "hardened" if it is heated red-hot, then suddenly cooled. A tub of water or an oil bath is commonly used for the cooling process. Water cools most quickly, but it has a tendency to scale the steel and make it excessively brittle. Oil is a little slower in its cooling powers, but is believed to add carbon to the steel.

After hardening, comes tempering. That's the difficult part. The hardened steel is again heated to a red heat, softening it slightly. The point is then doused into the cooling fluid to harden the lower end. It is next withdrawn and the scales are rubbed off. The heat from above the end, that is from that part of the steel not plunged into the cooling bath, will naturally be conducted down to the tip. A definite series of colors plays over the surface of the steel point as the temperature increases, beginning with pale yellow, to deep yellow, to brown, then purple and finally blue. If the end is allowed to become red again, all the effects of the chill are removed, all the hardness taken out.

Each different color represents a definite degree of hardness in decreasing scale from the pale yellow to blue. The idea is to check the warming over of the tip at that color which best approximates the degree of hardness desired. When the steel point assumes the color wanted, the entire tool is finally cooled by immersion in the water or oil-filled tub. A tool plunged at a pale yellow is very hard; one allowed to reheat to blue comparatively soft.

Experience and nothing else will teach you the proper temper for tools, both drill bits and picks, used in any specific ground. A hard rock, like quartz for instance, generally takes

tools plunged at light yellow. Sharp tools are important. Drill bits which have been properly tempered will wear down uniformly until they are too blunt for further service and have to be resharpened. Improperly tempered tools will be brittle, and the cutting edges will break or crack off.

Incidentally, it is not good practice to attempt to harden a crow-bar. The process makes them too brittle under heavy strain.

In placing drill holes, experience and a practiced driller are the only real teachers. In cutting a face for the usual four-by-six tunnel or adit, about eight holes may be required. The whole face may be drilled, then fired, or sets may be drilled and fired in succession.

A general layout in the four-by-six rectangle face would be three holes drilled across the face at approximately the middle line, and spaced equidistant. The center hole should be drilled straight in. The two side holes should angle towards their respective side walls. Three more or less similar holes known as uppers should be drilled in the top third of the rectangle. In the case of the uppers, the two side holes should angle towards the walls and up. Then two holes might be placed in the lower third of the face, the holes being driven down and outwards towards the walls. These are lifters. These eight holes should do the work. If the ground is soft or easily shattered, six holes will probably be sufficient. No hard and fast rules can be laid down.

Straight dynamite consists of nitroglycerin, sodium nitrate, and some absorbent such as wood meal or sawdust. It is made in various grades and strengths. And the individual cartridges come in various sizes. For instance, there is a low-freezing dynamite that will not freeze until water freezes. Ordinary dynamite freezes at 50° F, or while it is still nearly twenty degrees too warm to freeze water. This is an important thing to remember. Dynamite will explode as a result of a shock or sharp blow at ordinary temperatures, but the violence of the shock or blow required to explode it decreases as the temperature increases. In other words, dynamite is more dangerous and touchy, more liable to go off if dropped or struck, on a hot day than on a cold one.

Thawing dynamite is a dangerous business, and it should be carried out with extreme caution at a temperature not higher than body heat. It is something that should never be attempted by the novice anyhow. Experienced men usually develop their own individual methods for meeting such an emergency. So we won't explain any method in these pages.

However, it might be mentioned that putting a few frozen sticks in a double-boiler—with the double boiler *off the stove*—and pouring the warm water in the lower part of the boiler is a familiar expedient among cold-country miners and prospectors. Through ignorance or carelessness, this same practice has sent a lot of prospectors hurriedly out of their cabins—through the roof instead of the door.

Another caution—thawed dynamite, no matter how expertly it may be thawed, for some strange reason seems more erratic and uncertain than dynamite that has not been frozen and thawed out.

Besides calm nerves and a cool head, the accessories required in blasting rock are caps, fuse, cap crimpers, tamping rods, and stemming material.

Caps are little copper cylinders closed at one end. They are about a quarter-inch in diameter and from one to two inches long. They contain the *highly explosive* charge of fulminate of mercury, which is set off by the spitting sparks from the fuse. And in turn the explosion of the cap sets off the dynamite. Caps come in boxes of 100, or multiples thereof. The cap is squeezed onto the fuse by

means of a tool looking much like a pair of pliers, and this is called a crimper.

*Don't crimp a cap with your teeth.* That used to be quite a habit with old-timers. Some of them may still be living. But it is also a good way to get your head blown off.

Fuse generally consists of a core of finely divided black powder particles mixed with a thread composed of hemp or cotton fibers. The core is protected by outer wrappings. Single-tape fuse will do for dry or slightly damp holes and ground. Where water has been used for drilling, however, double-tape is better. The rate of burning of a fuse should be carefully checked and tested, as sometimes it varies between wide limits according to local conditions, weather conditions, and so forth. Fuse manufactured in the United States is timed to burn at the rate of forty seconds per foot. There is an allowable variation of ten per cent either way. But don't take my word for it—or anybody else's. Test the fuse yourself and take into account the difference in rate often produced by local conditions.

Here are a few more things to remember about the rate of burning of dynamite fuse. Pressure from the stemming material used to pack in the hole on top of the charge increases the rate of burning of the fuse a lot, sometimes as high as seventy-five per cent over the normal. Dampness causes retardation of the rate. Marked changes in altitude will affect the burning rate. Fuse should be carefully stored where it will not be subject to moisture or excessive temperature. And *don't ever make the mistake* of getting a hold of a length of "Instantaneous Fuse" by accident. This is a special fuse designed for high-powered quarry work and such. *It burns at the rate of 450 feet per second.*

After the cap is crimped onto the fuse, a hole is punched into the dynamite cartridge with the handle of the crimper or a small stick of wood. The primer, as cap and attached fuse is called, is then stuck into the dynamite and a cord tied around cartridge and fuse. The primer may be inserted in one end of the stick or in the side about the middle of the stick.

The amount of explosive, of course, depends upon the depth of hole drilled and the toughness of the rock. The length of fuse depends upon the distance a man has to go to reach safety after lighting the fuse. When the dynamite is in the hole, force it firmly but *carefully* to the very bottom with a wooden tamping rod. Then sand or clay, known as stemming, is dropped in the hole and tamped carefully down until the hole is full to the top. You are then ready to fire the charge.

Some excellent *don'ts* in connection with the use of explosives are given by von Bernewitz. He warns:

*1—DON'T crimp a cap with the teeth.*

*2—DON'T open a box of caps or dynamite with a hammer, nail, or hatchet. (Don't use anything that might cause an open spark, that is. Use a wooden wedge for opening boxes of dynamite, and open the box with care.)*

*3—DON'T store caps and dynamite near one another.*

*4—DON'T smoke or carry open lights while carrying explosives.*

*5—DON'T use frozen dynamite.*

*6—DON'T load a chambered or sprung hole until it has cooled.*

*7—DON'T go near a misfire for three hours nor attempt to remove the stemming and charge of any misfire. Drill another hole near it and explode that.*

Incidentally, practically all explosives deteriorate in time, some quicker than others. Dynamite should be used as "fresh" as possible and never stored or kept for too long. Straight dynamites can be stored about a year and a half at the most under ordinary conditions. *But in hot climates such as the desert country of the Southwest about six months is the safety limit.* This applies especially to dynamites with a strength of over forty

per cent. In cold climates, where the powder is apt to be alternately thawed and frozen, a year is the best limit to set.

Concerning the keeping of dynamite, George J. Young in his "Elements of Mining" says, "In the storage of explosives well-ventilated magazines and uniform temperatures will result in a minimum deterioration. Dryness, but not excessive dryness, is necessary for all powders. The maximum magazine temperature should not exceed 90° F, and if it is desired to keep explosives permanently thawed, the minimum temperature should not fall below 52 degrees.

"The appearance of an explosive is frequently indicative of deterioration. The blaster should be familiar with the color, texture, and feel of the explosive when in a fresh condition. Any alteration in the normal appearance should put him on his guard.

"Exudation of nitroglycerin is readily discovered either by the greasy feeling of the cartridges or by the appearance of the nitroglycerin on the inside of the cartridge paper. Chemical change is sometimes detected by unusual flecks of color. Crystallization of salts upon the outside of cartridges is evidence of changes produced by excessive moisture. The hardening of the explosive is due either to freezing or chemical change. Explosives which show deterioration, even to a very slight extent, should be either destroyed or used at once. Extreme caution should be the rule in handling explosives in which deterioration is suspected."

wherever gold has been known or is thought to exist. As a matter of fact, the County Recorder's office down there says that they are mighty busy, with new location notices being put on the books almost every day. Prospecting is vigorous and many placer miners are working on the slopes of the Pinals and also up in the Tonto Basin to the northward.

## *Do You Know Your SLUICE BOX?*

*1—For single-hand work what diameter drill steel should be used?*

*2—How heavy should the hammer be in such work?*

*3—About how deep a hole can one man hand-drill in hardrock per day?*

*4—What does dynamite consist of?*

*5—Standard United States manufactured fuse is timed to burn at what rate per foot?*

*(The answers to these questions will be printed in the next issue of ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE.)*

### Answers to Questions in First December Issue

1—An adit is a horizontal tunnel driven to intercept the vein beneath its surface outcropping. 2—An average ton of gold-bearing quartz occupies between twelve and thirteen cubic feet of space. 3—One hundred feet, approximately, is the economical limit for hand-hoisting material out of a shaft. 4—A mine adit for convenient working without excessive size should be about four and a half feet wide by a little over six feet high. 5—Driving a horizontal adit is, as a rule, cheaper and easier foot for foot than sinking a vertical shaft.

**A GET-TOGETHER DEPARTMENT FOR GENERAL SERVICE TO OUR READERS**

**Conducted by The Storekeeper**

## THE BARGAIN COUNTER

*If you want to exchange something you have, but don't want, for something you want that someone else has, here is the place to do it. It must be understood that* ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE *cannot be held responsible for losses sustained by our readers.*

*Announcements inserted free of charge, but they must not exceed* 21 *words, inclusive of name and address, and must be either typed or hand-printed. Nothing but BONA FIDE trades acceptable; announcements of articles for sale will be ignored. State both what you have and what you want. Study examples of announcements in this issue for the proper way to draft yours.*

*The United States Government prohibits mailing of firearms capable of being concealed on the person, therefore swaps of revolvers, pistols, etc., will not be published in "The Bargain Counter."*

Postmarks and covers to trade for U. S. and foreign stamps. Send your list for mine and how you will trade. L. E. White, 525 W. 29th St., Norfolk, Va.

Police short-wave adapter, best offer of stamps or radio parts takes it. G. A. Brown, 182 Indian Grove, Toronto, Canada.

All collectors of match books, postmarks or precancels or anyone having mint U. S. stamps to trade, write me. C. Dunbar, 406 Perry Ave., Ft. Wayne, Ind.

Stamps on approvals, polished agates, coins for arrows, spears, relics and curios. Big list. V. Lemley, Northbranch, Kans.

Will trade postmarks for stamps. Make offer in lots of 100 or more. J. F. Kneifel, 6540 N. Oak Park Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Small boxwoods, umbrella trees, black walnut trees, etc., for a finishing up picture outfit or anything useful. G. Singleton, Seneca, S. C.

Want canaries, lovebirds, various birds, live squirrels, coons, perennial plants, guitar, banjo-uke. Enormous list. S. Lewis, 5025 Ogden Ave., Cicero, Ill.

Phone directories, my town for yours. Newspapers, my town for yours. D. H. Townsend, Bald Knob, Ark.

Want to swap for old broken or worn out jewelry, set with old-time cameos, also for rough turquoise. A. Lawrence, Box 165, Galveston, Ind.

Want Michael's 41 lesson telepathy course, "A Miracle a Day" and the book "Secret of the Night," published by Paty Co. Have fine swaps. S. Kerr, 6893 Waldo, Detroit, Mich.

Printing supplies, photo enlarging apparatus, police short-wave adapters, for any radio. Want gold coins, diamonds. Mohr, 34 Fernhill, Buffalo, N. Y.

For 100 2x4 postmarks, I'll send 90 unused and 10 used foreign stamps. Will exchange lists. M. Ahrens, Box 144, Hackettstown, N. J.

Trade 17-j. Bulova wrist watch. Want shotgun, old sword. Want bird dog pup, prefer setter, or what have you? Wm. Stanton, 624 Homeview Ave., Springfield, O.

Camera, golf clubs, coins, stamps, books, magazines, golf balls, etc., for rifle, or shotgun. W. T. Pentland, 262 Warren Rd., Toronto, Canada.

Have 50 Confederation tokens. Want Indian head cents before 1880 and also large Liberty cents and half cents. C. Freund, 207 Front St., Stratford, Ont., Canada.

Have curios and game. Send your list to me. Dr. Woodford Hammond, 1222 Reeves Ave., Mena, Ark.

Want Miller and Cummings' formulas. What do you want in exchange? Owen Park Store, 426 N. Maybelle, Tulsa, Okla.

Have ships' models, battery operated radios, rabbits. Want guns, watches, cabinet makers' tools, binoculars. O. F. Rideout, 30 Friend St. Place, Lynn, Mass.

Queen and Co. Wheatstone Bridge, 10,000 ohms. V. S. Whitney, 108 Burnet Park Dr., Syracuse, N. Y.

Have 60,000 precancels and foreign to trade. Want Norse American, Hawaii, Kans. and Nebr. overprints. U. S. $2 and $5 stamps. H. J. O'Rourke, 30 Hotchkiss St., Middletown, Conn.

Have all kinds of books, magazines, Confederate money, 2 gold watches. Want bird dogs, hounds, small guns, pheasants, etc. W. A. Gordon, Jefferson, Ga.

Precancels exchanged. Washington bicentennial issue, double line types, new dues, stamp for stamp. Send your duplicates. Pequoig Stamp Exchange, 50 Tremont St., Athol, Mass.

Want small lathe, printing press, post drill, guns. Have clarinet, guitar, Alumno skates, drafting set, and? R. Senechal, Anamoose, N. D.

Want outboard motor. Have valuable Norwegian hunting knife, tubular skates, complete telegraph, etc. L. Risley, 43 Princeton St., Springfield, Mass.

Exchange 50 different British Colonials for five unused 3c U. S. stamps. P. Geen, 223 John St., Belleville, Ont., Canada.

Want radio, batteries, parts. Have guns, flashlight, camera, stamps, coins and many other articles. S. Ragozino, Box 249, Lowellville, O.

Will trade four-color illustrated catalog of dime novel stories for two new Olympic or Washington stamps. F. T. Fries, Orrville, O.

Have land, piano, jewelry, courses, books and list. Want stamps, toy moulds, miniatures, etc. Write. C. Walck, Box 887, Lansford, Pa.

Fine new 7mm rifle, 'scope sight, detachable, ammunition. Want Graflex, I. C. S. textbooks, encyclopedia, Indian goods, or? Wardell, 8 Scott Ave., Mill Valley, Calif.

Have boxing gloves, .20 ga. shotgun, 85 magazines, for motorcycle, or what have you. Gorden Nevitt, R. R. 5, Fowler, Ind.

Waltham 7-j. auto clock, baseball mitt, typewriter, Yale lock, shoe-skates. Want good .12 ga. and guns, or? Send for list. H. W. Romine, Box 44, Athens, O.

Trade one U. S. half cent or four large copper cents for each block of four unused nine cent Washington bicentennial stamps. C. W. Eckert, 713 High St., Bethlehem, Pa.

Guinea fowl, turkeys, pedigree chinchilla rabbits, chickens, poultry, tattoo machine for Liederman, Jowett, Hawaiian guitar course, typewriter. Vanecho, R. 4, St. Clairsville, O.

Have detective course, xylophone, camera, battery charger, etc. Want vest pocket camera, shoe-skates, 10½ or 11, canoe, binoculars. F. F. Pieper, 1120—7th St., Menomonie, Wis.

Want rifle, law books. Have or can get almost anything. Wm. Folk, 607—18th St., Altoona, Pa.

Have .22 special Winchester repeater, 43 Egyptian, portable phonograph, pair rabbits, Indian head pennies. Want portable typewriter. C. Simonson, Ashby, Minn.

Have .380 automatic in perfect condition to trade for repeating or automatic .22 rifle in same condition. Ted Harwell, 507 E. 4th St., Burkburnett, Tex.

Have T Ford radiator to trade, for? Have books and magazines to trade for same. Henry Bowen, R. F. D. 3, Pontotoc, Miss.

Want rare U. S. half dollars, best condition. Have collection large cents, 117 pieces with fine 1804. Two dates missing. H. G. Kirkpatrick, 1624 Marshall St., Rosemead, Calif.

Have bound magazines, books, stamps, watches. Want Edison cylinder phonograph and records, art photos, stamps, knives. C. D. Hines, Box U, Apopka, Fla.

Want sun dial, hour glass, arrowheads or guns. Have musical instruments, books, magazines and Indian head cents. E. Vanas, 1810 S. 61st Ct., Cicero, Ill.

Parakeets (love birds), Mexico gold coins and Mexico curios. Send your list. B. P. Willis, Box 1085, San Antonio, Tex.

Want street car or bus tokens, Liberty head dime before 1900 for each one accepted. G. R. Alexander, 1001 N. Linden St., Bethlehem, Pa.

GE, 110V, AC, type AZ183A, induction disc phonograph motor. Want ⅛ h. p. A. C. motor or offer. J. R. Mercer, 729 E. Calumet St., Centralia, Ill.

Have one and two cent trans. Miss., Edison and Arbor Day stamps. Want Indian pennies, arrowheads. F. Ragan, Fremont, Nebr.

Desk adding machine, mandolin, swords, bayonets, taxidermy course, radio parts, hunting knife, pocket adding machine for Indian relics. C. O. Schollar, 124 W. 3rd St., Tama, Iowa.

Every five Indian heads before 1890 gets one banjo, violin or guitar silver-plated string, new, any size. G. Schulz, 400 Elm, Calumet, Mich.

Will swap 25 different U. S. for 6 unused 2c commemoratives or 4—3c commemoratives; precancels, stamp for stamp. K. Wilcox, 607 Bear St., Syracuse, N. Y.

Want MacFadden culture library, motorcycle, guitar, Indian pennies. Have 1930 Harley, barbells, C melody sax, radios, magazines, etc. S. Reagan, Mt. Olive, Ill.

Have 6 power opera glasses, 53 ACE-HIGHS, 50 other Westerns, 100 miscellaneous, pocket Ben watch. Want ACE-HIGHS and others before 1930. W. Allison, 238 Zara St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Two lots, 50x100 ft., near Atlantic City, N. J., exchange for jewelry, or? Boye, 25 Monteith St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Guns, typewriters, electric fan, Geographics, fishing tackle, books, all kinds groceries, for what? H. Brown, 7001 Wolfram St., Chicago, Ill.

Swap a cloth-bound fiction book in good condition for 30 United profit sharing certificates. E. J. Rife, 821 N. Holly St., W. Philadelphia, Pa.

Have covers, first day and air mail covers, stamps, magazines, books, etc. What's offered in first day and air mail covers, coins, etc.? S. A. Gregor, 1024 Kilsyth Rd., Elizabeth, N. J.

Northern and Western land, radios, typewriters, watches and books, trade for Florida land or lots. L. Larson, R. 4, Lake City, Fla.

Will swap 100 or more bachelors', widowers', widows' and maids' names and addresses for same, or what do you want? E. R. Bradley, Hackensack, Minn.

Two magazines for every old coin sent me, four for every arrow. J. Sohler, Belden, Nebr.

Trade a set of model T Ford overhead valves in best condition for paint sprayer, or? H. Pritchard, 38 Scenery Ave., Battle Creek, Mich.

Want Audels' guides, carpenters, masons, builders, plumbers and electricians. Also Popular Mechanic magazines. Will give stamps, books or printing. Supt., 933 E. 167th St., N. Y. C.

Want .22 Remington automatic and .22 silencers. Have a large swap list. Remsen, 769 Hunterdon St., Newark, N. J.

Want stamps, any quantity. Will give other stamps, books or printing. Schuck, 933 E. 167th St., New York City.

Want compressed air rifle or air pistol, single shot or repeater. Have stamp collection, or? H. Romer. 2841 Boulevard, Jersey City, N. J.

Have mandolin, 12 strings, picks, mandolin instruction book. Trade for Spanish guitar. H. Kling, 6196 Rohns, Detroit, Mich.

Want photos of female boxers or wrestlers, art or unusual snapshots. Have same deerfoot knives or anything you want. C. Guyette, c/o Billboard, 251 W. 42nd St., N. Y. C.

¼ h. p. 110 D. C. motor. Will trade for coins. Guy M. Reed, Otsego, Mich.

Have code practice set, guitar, books, stamps, banjo-uke. Want boxing gloves, books on boxing, or? R. McQuiston, Box 262, Route 2, Lake Providence, La.

300 old magazines, all kinds, of recent date. Will trade for what have you? J. D. Mullins, Jr., 3 Widows Lane, Honaker, Va.

Want copper and iron ores from Michigan, copper from Arizona, zinc from Missouri, etc. What is wanted? H. Stillwell, Rockville Centre, N. Y.

Will swap 50 different stamps and my approvals for four penny unused stamps. Write today. Joseph G. Buck, 3230 S. Lime St., Chicago, Ill.

Have bicycle and carpenter tools, sign paints and cardboards, loudspeaker, tubes and parts, mandolin. Want Hawaiian guitar, rifle. S. Kwiatkowski, 8 Seymour St., Worcester, Mass.

Precanceled air mail or West Indies stamps for Liberty nickels. W. Hartshorn, 4016 Bryce, Ft. Worth, Tex.

Have U. S. 1799 silver dollar, good condition. Want 8 or 10 power binoculars. B. Broady, 821 Crescent St., Astoria, L. I., N. Y.

2 Mexican given for every Washington half, 7, 8c stamps. Want good foreign stamp connections. C. Gibbs, 12 S. Bay Shore Ave., Bay Shore, N. Y.

Have old coins, one 1834 penny, arrowheads. Want good typewriter. A. W. Bridges, Mooresboro, N. C.

How many fine large cents, precancel stamps am I offered for 27 different dates, Indian cents, other trades. J. Kostillo, 510 Main St., Benwood, W. Va.

Will trade banjo, ice-skates, wireless transmitter, magazines for steel guitar. Forrest Sailors, 3111 E. 19th St., Kansas City, Mo.

Want old or foreign newspapers. What do you want? Maynard Nixon, Willow Creek, Mont.

Want good kodak, films, cable exercisers, heavy dumbbells, small boys' and men's boxing gloves, 1½ inch rope, etc. D H. c/o R. Hubbard, 8611 Helen Ave., Detroit, Mich.

Have many late songs in Spanish on victrola and phonograph records. Make offers and send your list. B. P. Willis, Box 1085, San Antonio, Tex.

Will trade kodak scenic snapshots for same, also trade for negatives. Must be clear, sharp pictures. B. P. Willis, Box 1085, San Antonio, Tex.

Ice-Ola, artificial ice, keeps food, drink, cool and fresh. Formula for one old quarter. A. O'Neill, 6734 Idaho Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Oliver typewriter, for what? All answered. Bob Loomell, Brockton, Mont.

Want "Key to Might and Muscle" by Jowett, "Abdominal Control" by Hernic, "Tumbling" by MacMahon and books on strength, for? G. Nisi, 212 Clifton Ave., Newark, N. J.

Want late telephone directory from every city of more than 50,000 population. Swap. Sam Greenberg, Brownsville, Tenn.

Have .32-40 rifle, Ballard action set, trigger, perfect condition, single shot. Will trade for small screw cutting lathe. C. Creveling, 603 North 1st, Arkansas City, Kans.

Golf clubs, fishing pole, commemorative stamps for good Indian relics, not arrows or broken stuff. Geo. W. Haskin, Swiftwater, Pa.

Want silk, cotton dresses and piece goods. Have radio, violin, bugle, tattoo outfit, etc. Mrs. A. Eyre, 414 Liberty St., Camden, N. J.

Have rifles, books, banjo, guitar, Indian relics, minerals. Your list for mine. J. B. Colburn, 424 Main St., Rapid City, S. Dak.

Year's subscription to "Bits O' Humor" for 25 unused 1c stamps. Also want printing material. R. Strickland, Baldwyn, Miss.

Have Conn and Holton saxophones, complete with cases. Want professional type piano accordion, 120 bass. W. Miller, 1029 Broadway Blvd., Reading, Pa.

Have 9 cloth-bound books, 6 months' subscription to Hunting, Fishing and Trapping, and foreign stamps. Want mounted birds and animals. Shouse, 1128 Banklick St., Covington, Ky.

Have .16 ga. reloading tool, Martin uke, professional model, Daisy air rifle, new. Want hunting, fishing, trapping equipment. G. Glass, 14 Spring St., Brattleboro, Vt.

Swap radio parts, photos, tricks, watch auto accessories, magazines, for early pennies, watches. V. Russell, R. 1, Box 41A, Pueblo, Colo.

Exchange U. S. coins. A stamp brings information. Morris Shapiro, 1936 Prospect Pl., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Want complete piano course, offer course in poultry or farm knowledge in 4 large volumes. R. W. Patridge, 573 Mithoff St., Columbus, O.

Bryan and Stevenson campaign badge and other things for old coins and Indian goods. A. J. Bassett, Attica, Iowa.

Trade two Canadian Cartier stamps for two U. S. 20c special delivery stamps. Exchange precancels. T. C. Henry, Drawer 367, Granite City, Ill.

Trade double-barrel shotgun with recoil pad. Make offer. No stamps. L. Nedberg, West Ave., Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Have magazines, earphones, crystal set, coins, match covers, Indian heads. Want arrowheads or coins. P. Pintsak, 1034—8th Ave., Munhall, Pa.

Want to trade songs in number form for Hawaiian steel guitar. Send list. J. Zavoda, 1546 Holmden Ave., Cleveland, O.

Have 14,000 formulas. Any 3 for 30 2c unused U. S. commemorative, no Washington or 25 3c unused stamps. M. Wukasch, 407 W. 23rd, Austin, Tex.

15 rare art photos, swap for 50 mint U. S. 2c commemoratives. Superior, 137 Cornwall, Mt. Royal, Montreal, Canada.

Want perfect spear and arrowheads. What do you want in new jewelry? Carl Bitting, 403 Bitting Bldg., Wichita, Kans.

Have sixteen "Bring Back Beer" and "Prosperity" ties. What am I offered for them? Joseph Kalweit, Main and Cherry St., Plymouth, Pa.

Lithographed hotel and steamer labels wanted from all parts of the world, quantities. Have tattooing goods. Miller, 431 Main, Norfolk, Va.

Trade 80 magazines about formulas, technical notes and specifications of airplanes for .16 or .12 ga. repeating shotgun. A. Zolotar, 30 N. Cass Ave., Westmont, Ill.

Books to swap for other articles, all kinds. Send your list for mine. R. Hout, Box 183, Lovington, Ill.

Guns, watches, courses, banjo, kodak, etc. Want incubator, Ford, typewriter, etc. C. Wetzel, Box 402, Middlebourne, W. Va

Want earphones, speakers, B eliminators, crystal radios, for Western magazines, stamps and golf clubs. A. Matyjewic, Jordan, N. Y.

Trade B flat cornet and case for Boehm system, B flat clarinet. N. Sandberg, 810—17th Ave., Fargo, N. Dak.

Will trade "The Young Virginia Patriots" (a story of the Revolution) for 10c worth of unused Washington bicentennial stamps. C. A. Neetz, Box 214, Emaus, Pa.

Want good .22 repeater or .410 double. Have canned foods, good swap list. R. E. Riesland, Bandon, Ore.

Trade 70 different Canadian stamps, cat. val. three dollars, for 24 unused U. S. 3c Washington stamps. J. F. Bartels, 730 E. 178th St., N. Y. C.

Jowett's courses, Liederman's and Calverts' book on physical culture and strength wanted for? Have physical culture courses, books, etc. G. Nisi, 212 Clifton Ave., Newark, N. J.

Have 5x8 hand printing press. What's offered? Samples of its work on request. All letters answered. Julius Penn, 11 W. 33rd St., Bayonne, N. J.

Have 1000 names of late mail order buyers. Want offers. O. Lee, 4302 College Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

Old coins, California gold quarter and half dollar size to trade for U. S. early stamps, etc. Norman Shults, Box 746, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Want Indian relics, antique guns and weapons. Will trade coins, stamps, swords and miscellaneous articles. W. E. Bozarth, Box 244, Williamsburg, Va.

Will give 25 foreign or 25 precancels for each naval cover sent me, foreign or precancels for precancels. H. J. Lindhardt, 7106—10th Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

Will trade Canada air mail covers for same of U. S. A. or others. First flights only. J. Dickenson, 2109 Winnipeg St., Regina, Sask., Canada.

Good money making road formulas. Trade for value, or what? L. L. Erickson, Valley Springs, S. Dak.

Want press, 5x8, 6x8, 8x12, piano courses, religious books, typewriter, etc. Honest dealing, no junk. West, Walkertown Sta., Hazard, Ky.

Will give good trades for old or broken flint or percussion guns. Write me. T. H. Vann, 94 Westland St., Hartford, Conn.

Have Buescher C melody saxophone, Pathex projector, lady's seal coat, 13 football helmets, new, for what? M. Alstrand, 3558 Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Have Sunstrand cash register and adding machine with bookkeeping compartment, .20 ga. single. What have you? F. J. McClintock, Box 666, Pierre, S. Dak.

Swap stamps, etc., you don't want for items you need. Satisfaction guaranteed. E. Jahnke, 219 E 8th St., Flint, Mich.

Have an old 1856 gold dollar. Will accept any good offer of a .22 cal. gun, or? Please describe fully. W. Johnson, 2276 Tyler Ave., Fresno, Calif.

Anyone having a Johnson twin motorwheel and will send me a wiring diagram of the magneto will send you ten magazines. F. Bridges, 66 Oakdale St., Brevard, N. C.

Anyone having a Montgomery Ward and Co. two in one guitar outfit, I will give a good trade. Guitar must be in perfect condition. F. Shutt, Box 45, Wyco, W. Va.

Have Aces-Highs and other magazines. Want Battle before 1928 with full covers. J. Ronaghan, 1661 Lurting Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

Have type, cases, printing material, press, job printing to trade for other printing equipment, paper, etc. Kay, R. 2, West Chicago, Ill.

Will trade cowboy hat (7⅛), rodeo shirt, 30 college pennants, old magazines, books for portable typewriter in good condition. Honest trade only. J. Hutchinson, 9 Stratford Terrace, Cranford, New Jersey.

Books, geographics, precancels, foreign and U. S. stamps to swap. Want U. S. stamps, precancels and air covers. J. F. Holley. Box 104, Claymont, Dela.

Want magazines, practically all kinds, any amount or dates. What's wanted? Ballard, 214 W. Broadway, Louisville, Ky.

Have four-tone automobile cornet, nearly new. Want rifle, boxing gloves or punching bag. L. J. Bowerman, Macedon, N. Y.

Have .410 Marlin repeater Want typewriter or Walther .22 rifle, perfect condition. R. Welker, 406 N. Harvey, Oak Park, Ill.

Have Indian Prince motor and transmission, 1926 Want 4 motorcycle wheels or airplane. P. A. Martin, 213—2nd St., Rockfalls, Ill.

Have A-1 minute camera, new surf reel, man's ring, steel guitar. Want guns, tent, coon hound, binoculars, or? W. C. Wilson, 117 Monroe St., Williamsport, Ind.

Want 44-40 W. C. F. tools and mould, Win. 22, single lever action, Stevens 25-25 Ballard action. Have new guns. W. C. Pixley, 257 Broadway, Proivdence, R. I.

Have 1866 Indian penny, 30 coins, casting baits. Want shotgun, formulas, offers. Stanley C. Rzepka, 191 Jay St., Coldwater, Mich.

Want fast overhead valve head and speed parts for model A. Trade musical instruments, electric radio, others. Colvin Terrell, Bryan, Tex.

50 different Canada stamps used, including No. 148 Scotts cat. value 20c for eleven unused 3c U. S. stamps. J. F. Bartels, 730 E. 178th St., New York, N. Y.

Stamps from all over the world on approval; take your pick for Indian pennies. Daniel Boone, Box 321, Tampa, Fla.

Will swap 60 good foreign stamps for 20 precancels, or 10 commemoratives. Louis Gischig, 1119 Walnut St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Will give 200 mixed U. S. and foreign for 8 unused or 35 used U. S. commemoratives. Young, 1429 Walnut St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Have nice violin outfit, also wonderful 3b rib mandolin. What's offered? B. Atkins, 764 Oakwood, Chicago, Ill.

Have 22 cal. Stevens rifle, also automatic. Want stamp albums only. Walter B. Kroll, 1732 W. 14th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Will trade actual pictures for actual photos of 'most any interesting or unusual subjects. Bernard Kobel, Box 105, Frankfort, Ind.

Have 28th Division in World War, 5 volumes, Mauser rifle 8 m/m, 15 shells, others. Want guitar, tenor-banjo. R. L. Stull, 608 Gibson St., Scranton, Pa.

Want binders for Geographics, swords, daggers, old or odd firearms old flintlock long gun, Indian relics. Send for my big list. Goulding, Box 543, Eustis, Fla

Have first flights, day and dedications, old letters, U. S. Want typewriters, guns, motorcycle, or? J. Kirkendall, 3343 W. 88th St., Cleveland, O.

Have tattoo outfit, supplies. Want art negatives, plate or enlarging camera. Joseph Verba, 15014 Edgewood Ave., Cleveland, O.

Booklet on how to start a home cannery, canning in tin cans for what? R. E. Riesland, Bandon, Ore.

Printing of any kind in exchange for Indian relics, curios, etc. Send for my list of printing; it's free. P. Smith, 817—48th St., Sacramento, Cal.

Will exchange stamps with foreign countries. All letters answered. Roy Theoes, 337½ Kaufmann Ave., Dubuque, Iowa

Have all brands cigarettes, tobacco and cigars, tax free. Trade for unused U. S. stamps, any kind. Knight Co., 8516 Sherwood, Hollywood, Cal.

Have typewriter, radio, printing press, guns, binoculars, cameras, bicycle, charger, guitar, duplicator, courses, motorcycle. Want typewriters, or? Jay Steel, Bellevue, Ky.

Registered coon hounds, radios, typewriter, roll top desk, other articles. Want canoe, rowboat, Delta woodworking tools (electric). Send for list. C. W. Campbell, Exeter, Nebr.

Have books, coins, magazines, pens, stamps, guns, etc. Want books and colored pictures. Send author, date and name. J. Kapsak, Sellersville, Pa.

Want old-time dime novels, such as N. Y. Detective, Beadle's Dime, Pluck & Luck, etc. Others to exchange, or? C. Arthur Neetz, Box 214, Emaus, Pa.

Tested formula—transfer photo to glass. Sent for 3 mint 7 cent bicentennial stamps. Carolina Stamp Co., Lincolnton, N. C.

Several new Ithaca trap guns, also single and double Lefever. No junk considered. E. F. Brigham, Box 1939, Atlanta, Ga.

Will swap high power repeating rifle for any carbines or rifles. Make offers to: Irving Joffe, 1800 Master St., Phila., Pa.

Trade "World Album," 1675 illustrations, 3500 spaces, 112 pages with 250 mounted stamps, for 4 mint 10c commemoratives. Clyde Cornwell, Lincolnton, N. C.

Want two cylinder gasoline engine. Have coins, stamps, radios, tools, etc. Nicholas Seechink, 420 E. 9th St., N. Y. C.

Trade A. C. radio, Elgin watch, broadcaster, code course; for suit, topcoat, overcoat, wrist watch, gun. P. Kearns, 2019 Wayne, Erie, Pa.

Have 45 .22 automatic cartridges, Civil War bayonet, scabbard, bullet case, belt, .22 single, gold balls. Swap lists. Want double shotgun. Rogers Tice, 221 Bway., Lynbrook, N. Y.

Have watches, R. C. A. tubes, S. W. parts. Want typewriter, 22 L. R. cartridges, guns, .22 belt, holster. Landon, Box 325 N. S., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Will give 10 different foreign stamps for each newspaper sent me. Maynard G. Nixon, Willow Creek, Mont.

Have small boxwood, crepe myrtles, umbrella trees, black walnut trees for field glasses, printing press or anything useful. L. Singleton, Rte. 1, Seneca, S. C.

Want bird eggs, especially hawks, ducks, owl, from any state. Have sword, coin, stamps, etc. W. T. Small, 1742—2nd St., Baker, Ore.

Precancels—each of us have specimens the other needs; why not swap? Also have arrows for precancels. J. Brooks, Golden City, Mo.

Will exchange stamps on approval sheets, basis Scott's catalog. C. R. Ingalls, 2207 Clinton Ave., Alameda, Cal.

Have brand new Italian accord and accord. course. Want Hawaiian guitar outfit, and guitar course. Harry Brown, Creemore, R. R. 1, Ontario, Can.

Want movie film, guns, punching bag, basketball, boxing gloves. Have .22 single, copper box, erector set, key buzzer. S. Wilde, 905 Harding St., Venice, Cal.

War relics, stamps, guns, minerals wanted. New airplane generator to trade. What do you want? Codding, 2503 E. 86th St., Cleveland, O.

Want Indian relics, U. S. large cents, white cents, 2 cent pieces, half dimes, first day covers. What's wanted? C. E. Koop, 489 Rugby Rd., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Trapping methods, Canadian stamps, views, etc., for complete set of 1932 Washington stamps, precancels, or commemoratives. Earl Harrop, Burks Falls, Ont., Can.

LaSalle business course in good condition. Want firearms, typewriter, radio, or what have you? D. Morrison, Caribou, Me.

Quantity of old U S. documentary stamps for trade. Also Int. Rev. stamps and 1790 English, French, Spanish documents. J. Mitchell, 305 New Second St., Natchitoches, La.

Have Milo barbell, 210 lbs. Have Harley twin motorcycle in good condition. Louis Ringeisen, 131-60—222nd St., Springfield, L. I., N. Y.

Want chemistry, taxidermy courses and chemical supplies, or? Have trumphet dagger, books, magazines, insects, moths, butterflies, old gun, etc. D. Smith, 27 N. Camp St., Windsor, Pa.

Have air mail covers, U. S. stamps, aviators' goggles. Want typewriter, camera, guns. J. Kirkendall, 3343 W. 88th St., Cleveland, O.

Have old 2 cent U. S. coin. Will trade for foreign stamps. H. H. Roach, Tripler General Hospital, Honolulu, T. H.

Want Hobbies, 5 point deer horns for 5 back number year units; 1 arrowhead for each number. Jack Owens, Calhoun, Ky.

Want unused U. S. stamps. Write first. Have stamps, view books, cards and other trades. A. Bathurst, 703 State St., York, Pa.

Have U. S. School of Music violin course, incubators, brooder, coupons, goats; for rabbits, baseball uniform, or? Lambert Hary, Rte. 1, Box 34, Monaca, Pa.

Have stencil duplicator. Want good fiction, guns, other sporting goods, offers. V. J Wissinger, Box 34, West Milton, Ohio.

Want arrowheads, guns, compass. Have kodaks, Indian-head pennies, billfold, army canteen, canned heat stove complete. Maurice Jacobson, 818 Ave. E., Bismarck, N. Dak.

Will give foreign of twice catalog value for U. S. stamps. List free. James McKeon, 70 Commonwealth, Attleboro Falls, Mass.

Swap my U. S. coins for best offer in commemorative coins. H. Bryden, 14 Village St., Reading, Mass.

1000 name business cards for three half dollars previous 1900. Send stamp for samples, details. D. R. Barrett, 63 Fremont St., Bridgeport, Conn.

Trade Win. S.S. 22, 26 in. S.S. trigger, burl stock. Want K .22, or? H. Bolan, Iroquois, S. D.

Will develop and print art negatives for copies of same, and exchange art photos. W Dawson, 28 Riverside Ave., Sanford, Me.

Have one horse motor, 110 or 220 volts, A. D. Will trade for steel cutting lathe, kodak, or? Joe Todd, Box 851, Hollidays Cove, W Va.

Have formula for self shaving cream. Will trade a copy for three one-cent stamps. G. L. Delhenty, Webbwood, Ont., Can.

Want Amazing, Wonder, Astounding, Weird, Ghost, Snappy and True Detective magazines. Ballard, 214 W. Broadway, Louisville, Ky.

Want typewriter, den decorations, or huntingknives. Have Marlin .22, "B" eliminator, speakers, metal stencil set, etc. Kenneth H. Stump, 7150 S. Emerald Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Will swap an excellent pair of loaded dice for every carton (200) of Lucky Strike cigarettes I receive. Packy Laurence, 3852 Tenth Ave., New York, N. Y.

U. S. coins, books, typewriter, and printing press wanted. Will make satisfactory offers in exchange. Morris Shapiro, 1936 Prospect Pl., B'klyn, N. Y.

Have printing, technical books, minerals. Want printers' supplies, ink, paper, also offers. No reasonable offer refused. John Abbott, 2137 Center Ave., Fort Lee, N. J.

Have automatic card press, prints 6000 an hour, large case of type. Want shotgun, or? David Chambers, 2613 Elizabeth, Zion, Ill

Want old gold, platinum, silver, all descriptions, sizes, shapes. What do you want? Paul Carney, 850 Rose St., Youngstown, Ohio.

Have arrowheads, armadillo skin, Civil War bullets, etc. Large list. Want old coins, swords, relics, guns. T. J. Henderson, Calhoun, Ga.

Have valuable formula for silvering knives, forks, etc. Will exchange for formula for silvering mirrors. Earl Lester, Tekamah, Nebr.

Want beagle dog or pup, bantam chickens, and canary birds. State your wants. C. W. Beam, Kylertown, Pa.

Have song manuscript; Home Physician, books, cartooning course. Want course in radio and writing, or? N. Little, MacGregor, Manitoba, Can.

Silver plate formulas, trade for 10 mint 10c bicentennial stamps. Clyde C. Cornwell, 308 N. Flint St., Lincolnton, N. C.

Marlin .12 gauge repeater, .12 ga. DB Winchester .44 cal. repeater carbine, .22 cal. rifles, banjo, mandolin, violin. Make offers. E. Rector, Mt. Sterling, Iowa.

Send me a cloth-bound fiction or textbook and receive 25 good formulas. Clark Atherton, West Branch, Mich.

Want old coins. Have Remington repeater, Savage automatic, and large trade list. Frank Lenz, Box 50, Station L, N. Y. C.

Have Paramount "C" tenor banjo and case, perfect condition. Want diamonds, Lugers, car radio, or? Cal Riepen, Y. M. C. A., St. Joseph, Mo.

Want 9" lathe tools, knurling tools or parts, tools. Have guns, kodaks, tools, or? Frank C. Green, Box 310, Marshall, Mo.

Have 6-j. man's pocket watch, two tube Radiola, headphones, trickle charger, showcard set, ladies' rings, list. All offers considered. Gilbert Dilla, Farwell, Neb.

Traders in Great Britain, Dominions, colonies: write me: Want your stamps in quantity, also other countries. Zieten, Box 655, Corsicana, Tex.

Have 75 arrowheads and 2 axes. Want books printed before 1840, also want books about Indians or Lincoln. Raymond Young, 365—6th St., Constantine, Mich.

Trade new .22 Savage rifle for 14 or 22k gold watch case. Murphy, Ozark Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

What is wanted for a standard 4 row keyboard typewriter in working order? All letters answered. A. L. Syhoski, 3382—23rd St., Detroit, Mich.

Swap binoculars, Corona, Elgin watch, antiques, camera, wrist watch, gas fixtures, electric fixtures. Want dog. A. Newbert, 627 First Ave., North Troy, N. Y.

Have German war service high grade sextant. Want pump or automatic duck gun, or? D. B. Shoemaker, Indian Head, Md.

Have many books, tattooing machine, gems, Mah Jong, etc. Want weapons, ivories. C. M. Scharping, Rte. 2, Waterport, N. Y.

Trade Little Leather Library and other books for U. S. airmail and commemorative stamps. L. Racicot, 21 Ripley Pl., Norwich, Conn.

Have ferrets, 4 cylinder Ace motorcycle, good shape, banjo mandolin. Want large outboard motor, or? Fred Hyde, Ninth & Mason, St. Joseph, Mo.

Want magazines, especially hobbies, antiques, late swap magazines, also shop notes and big mails. T. Greenwalt, 715 N. Chestnut, Litchfield, Ill.

Want clarinet, trombone, .22 carbine, .22 target rifle, officers' target model 38 cal., 8x binoculars. Harry L. Schmidt, Lake City, Minn.

Will trade 100 or more of my duplicate stamps for same number of yours, U. S. or foreign. Archie C. Rankin, 924—36th St., Oakland, Cal.

Have tattoo outfit, designs, etc. Want enlarging camera, postcard reflecting stereopticon; send for list. Joseph Verba, 15014 Edgewood Ave., Cleveland, O.

Have 40 air mail, 75 permits and 160 comm. covers for old coins: 10 art photos for 10 Indian heads. J. Metz, 1033 Seminary St., St. Paul, Minn.

Have Renault (French) racing car in finest condition. What's offered? Markis Trading Assn.-A Dept., 30 Adams St., Watertown, Mass.

100 different foreign or 50 mixed U. S. commemoratives for unused 2c Washingtons. Many other trades. Orville Teegardin, Hamilton, Ind.

Have 1842 silver dollar. What am I offered? Best offer gets it. Will trade for anything of value. S. Phillips, Ector, Tex.

Underwood, L. C. Smith and Oliver typewriters. Want guns, watches, musical instruments. A. E. Levriett, Box 3542, Sta. F., Jacksonville, Fla.

20 Lonesome Cowboy songs, words and music. Will trade for minerals. George Homer, 1305 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

For every U. S. half cent (good condition) you send, will give eight Indian head pennies. Norman Sherman, 363 Walnut Ave., Roxbury, Mass.

## WANTED—INFORMATION

*Are you looking for anyone who has been missing for a long time? If so, write down, either typed or hand-printed, all particulars and we will publish your notice in* ACE-HIGH MAGAZINE. *Notices may be listed anonymously if you so desire. Before taking action concerning any answers received, be sure to lay the matter before us. We assume no responsibility for this department. Do not send any money to strangers. Notify us at once when you have found your man.*

PASKOW, AL—Commercial artist and cartoonist from Brooklyn, N. Y. Please write to your old friend. Urb Sigel, Marshfield, Wis.

MINNIS, CHIQUITA JUNE—Of Shawnee, Okla. Artist. Please write to your old friend Urb Sigel, Marshfield, Wis.

BOYD, SAMUEL—McCRACKEN or DUNLAP—Known to ohums as "Snowball." Boyd left home 22 years ago, in June, 1910. Was born May 15, 1891, making him 41 years old. Was 5 ft. 8 in. tall, weighed 190 lbs., light complexion, light hair, blue eyes. Last heard of was in Oregon. Is believed to own or work on a cattle ranch in the West or Canada or Mexico. Boyd, please write at once to the address below as father is dead and mother wants and needs you. Your brother, Russell Fink, 709 Textile Ave., Clearfield, Pa.

WEBSTER, GEORGE—Missing from home since Sept. 15, 1931. Is 40 years of age, and has black hair, brown eyes, dark complected, heavy eyebrows, large nose, 5 ft. 6 or 7 inches tall, weight about 160. Long scar along left jawbone, ex-service man, speaks some Spanish. Works most at grocery business and cement work. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please notify his wife. Mrs. George Webster, Box 321, Panhandle, Tex.

DEWITT, CLARENCE—Age 34, weight 185, dark black hair, heavy build, a laborer. Last heard from in Chicago Any information will be appreciated. Otho Dewitt, Vandalia, Ill.

BUCK, HARLEY—Last heard of in Arvin, Calif., near Bakerfield, Calif. Is about 5 ft. 5 in. tall, weight 155 or 160 lbs., brown hair and eyes, age 20 or 21 Lived in Fresno, Calif., for some time; also in and near Merced, Calif. Has two brothers, Howard and Ralph. Any information will be appreciated. Leonard Van Wormer, Box 50424, San Quentin, Calif.

O'SHAUGNOSSEY, W. D.—My half-brother, a World War veteran. Last heard from had married in El Centro, Calif., last year. Since then I have been to Washington, D. C., in your behalf and arranged for you to receive large sum of money. Your fingerprints and papers I have for you is all the proof necessary. I also have papers of far more importance to you than the money. Write to me for details and answer my letters. See Mr. John Farmer, Calipatria, also Sheriff, El Centro. I wrote them asking about you. I am in the navy again, "E" Div. U. S. S. Wyoming, c/o P. M., N. Y. C. Am going to help you more than you think by removing an obstacle you mentioned in your last letter to me. Claudie W. McGlaughlin lives at Prichard, Ala. Write to her. Clyde Ransom.

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## THE TEXAS COWBOY'S LAST SONG

I'M dreaming of times when old Texas was home,
And yearning for prairies where longhorns did roam.
I long to meet the men who have shaped my career,
And taught by example to never know fear.

The range of the nighttime I miss most of all.
At sunset a calming benediction would fall;
The whirring of the wind in the sweet chaparral,
Was music from heaven to quicken the spell.

*Chorus:* Just to ride after cattle through blaze of the sun,
And sleep on my saddle when day's work is done.
Oh, would that I were there in the fragrance of spring,
To hear in the moonlight the mocking bird sing.

I hear even now the coyotes howl,
The bawl of the cow and the hoot of the owl.
The tinkling of the spurs and the slap of the chaps
Are sounds that will never from memory lapse.

I'd love to see father and mother again,
Then go on a round-up with big brother Ben,
And sit around the fire where the big yarns are told,
A-list'ning and dreaming of adventures bold.

*Chorus:* Just to ride after cattle through blaze of the sun,
And sleep on my saddle when day's work is done.
Oh, would that I were there in the fragrance of spring,
To hear in the moonlight the mocking bird sing.

Through memory's night a sweet face ever beams;
I left her there sleeping, the girl of my dreams.
They'll take me back to her when my life here is o'er,
And lay me to rest by her side ever more.

What men call success has been mine,
But in truth I owe ev'ry bit to the dreams of my youth,
And if it were for me a new life to begin
On the ranges of Texas I'd find strength to win.

*Chorus:* Just to ride after cattle through blaze of the sun,
And sleep on my saddle when day's work is done.
Oh, would that I were there in the fragrance of spring,
To hear in the moonlight the mocking bird sing.

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| 30x5.00-20" | 2.95 | 1.20 |
| 28x5.25-18" | 2.95 | 1.25 |
| 29x5.25-19" | 2.95 | 1.25 |
| 30x5.25-20" | 2.95 | 1.25 |
| 31x5.25-21" | 3.10 | 1.25 |
| 28x5.50-18" | 3.20 | 1.30 |
| 29x5.50-19" | 3.20 | 1.30 |
| 30x6.00-18" | 3.20 | 1.30 |
| 31x6.00-19" | 3.20 | 1.30 |
| 32x6.00-20" | 3.20 | 1.35 |
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| 32x4 | 2.95 | .95 |
| 33x4 | 2.95 | .95 |
| 32x4½ | 3.20 | 1.35 |
| 33x4½ | 3.20 | 1.35 |
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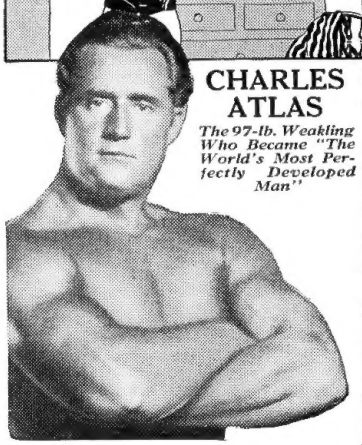
WHY FRED! I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE SO - PERFECTLY WONDERFUL!



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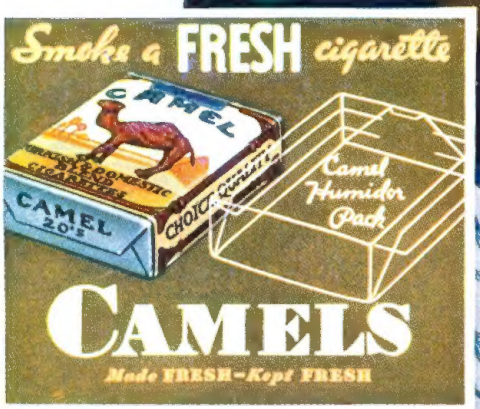


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